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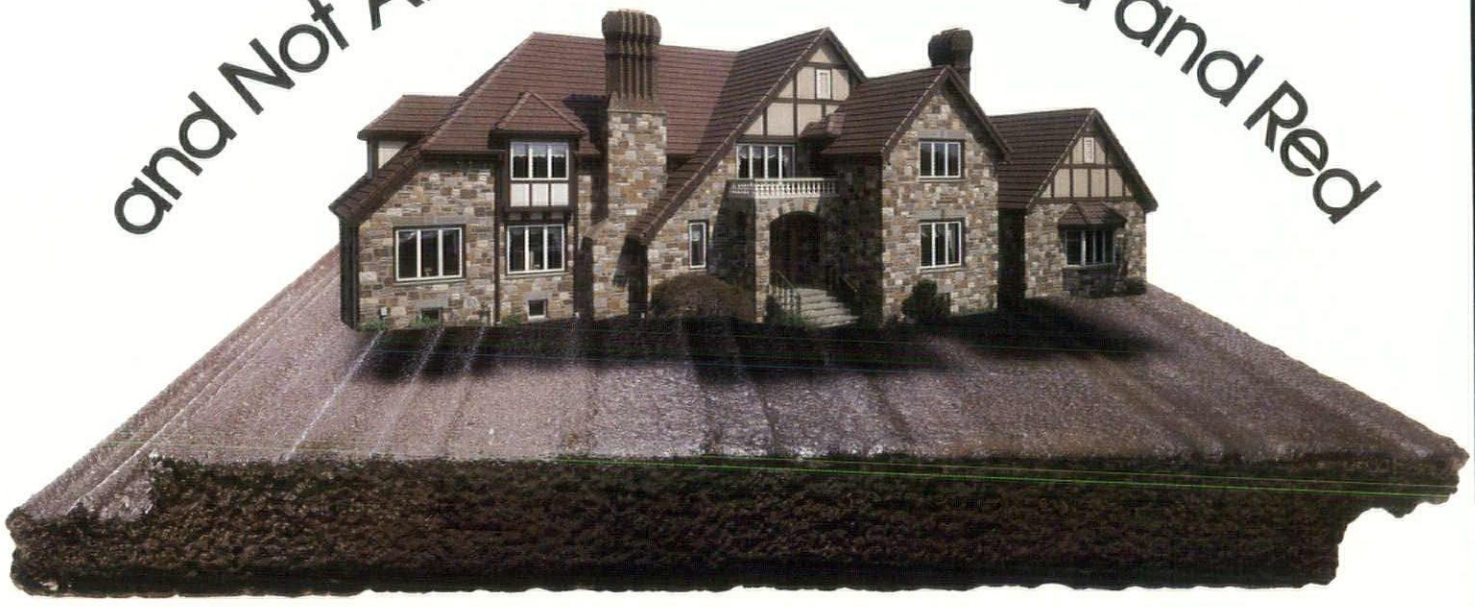
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Letters

Just the Facts

Congratulations for the excellent issue in November/December. I have rarely found so many interesting articles in one publication as I did in that issue, but I have a comment on one article, "The Architecture of Typography." Author Derek Bacchus refers to Illustration 3 as the façade of Santa Maria Novella in Florence. It is not the Novella but the Miniato Al Monte. Bacchus quotes Alberti: "One who is ignorant in geometry will not understand these or any other rules [of art]." I may say to Bacchus, "One who is ignorant in history will not understand these or any other rules [of art]."

Charles Szoradi, AIA
Washington, D.C.

Editor's note: Bacchus' original manuscript names both churches as examples of geometry made beautiful. The incorrect reference was an editing error, which we regret.

Kudos

My compliments on getting off to a very good start with *Inform*. I admire your goal of discussing architecture for what it should be — the skills and technologies for shaping and determining the built environment — and not just a collection of pretty faces, which is the approach of most architectural journals. You will find (if you don't already know) that it is a lot harder to do the former than the latter. I hope you will try to look at fewer things in depth, rather than more things superficially. Good luck.

Robert W. Duemling, President and Director
National Building Museum
Washington, D.C.

Not Impressed

Inform is slick, expensive, glitzy and empty. The graphics are unfocused and chaotic; the articles have no depth and are boring. I am especially amused by the disclaimer that the opinions expressed in *Inform* are those of the author and not the Virginia Society of the AIA, since there is neither substance nor opinion expressed in its travelogue mentality pabulum. *Inform* reminds me of a little story. "As the crowd gathered to gaze in amazement at the Emperor's new clothes, a little girl in the crowd exclaimed, 'New clothes? He isn't wearing ANY clothes.' "

Stuart N. Duffen, AIA
Virginia Beach

Due Credit

Allow me to congratulate *Inform* on its recent Gold Circle Award. Capturing this award after only one year of publication is a tribute to the editorial content and focus of your magazine. I feel, however, that the graphic design firm that organizes and designs this content – Communication Design – also deserves recognition for its role in winning the award. I mention this because none of the articles published in the local papers about *Inform*'s award included the name of the graphic designers. Beyond that, I am excited about the potential for a magazine that provides a forum for architecture, design and the arts – all in one place. It has been encouraging to find a magazine about the arts that pays as much attention to the layout of the page and the design as a whole as it does to the copy that goes in it. On behalf of the AIGA, I wish you continued success in presenting information from which we may all be informed and enriched, no matter what our design discipline.

Mary L. Mayer
President, Richmond Chapter
American Institute of Graphic Artists

Plea for a Good Cause

Thank you for the fabulous article on architecture in education ("More Than Child's Play") in the January/February issue. As I can attest from my involvement in the program, the kids, teachers, administrators and architects really are having fun, and I encourage more people to share in the excitement. The article already has served as a catalyst, but I want to hear from even more design professionals. Architecture in education is truly a win-win opportunity, not only for the young people but also for the profession.

Robert A. Magoon, Jr., AIA
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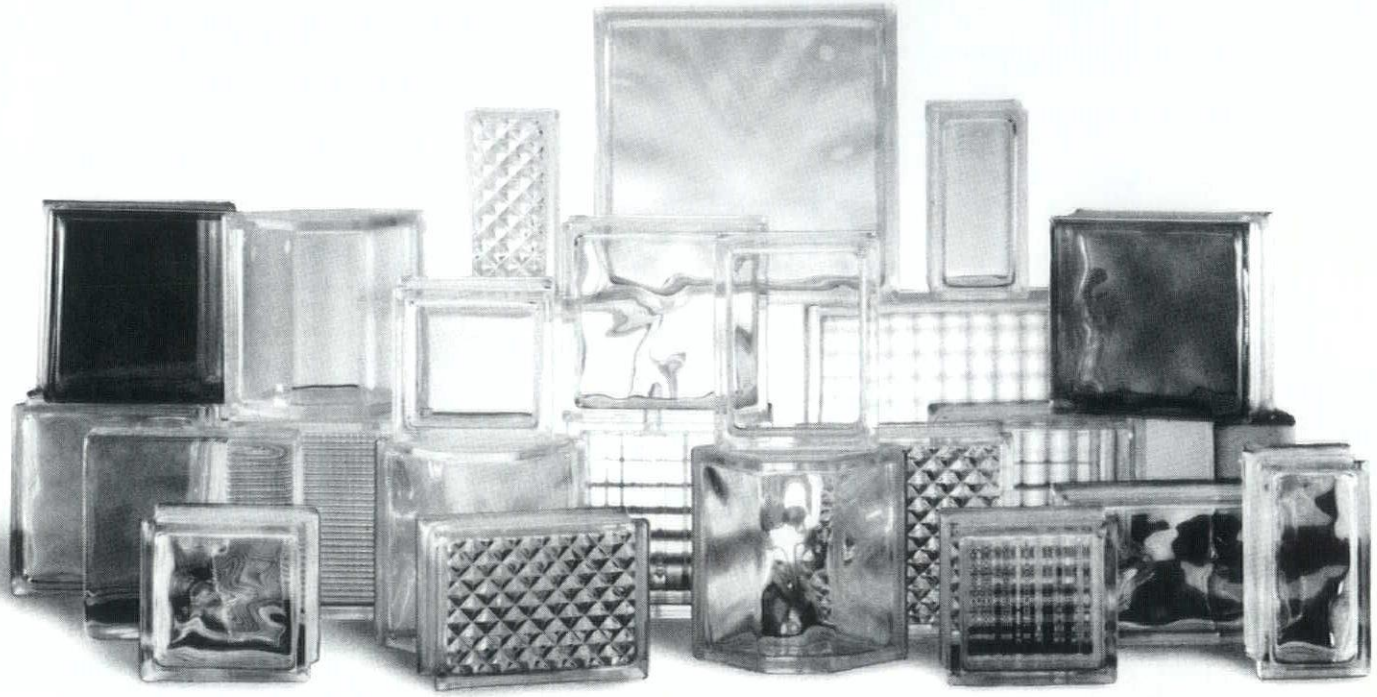
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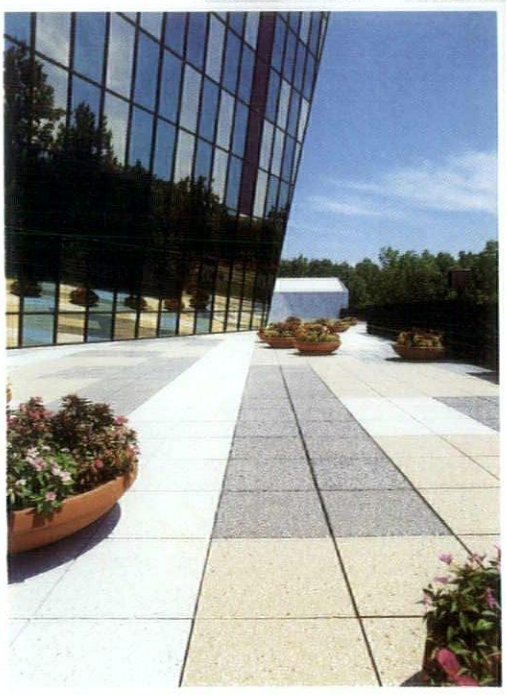
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inform

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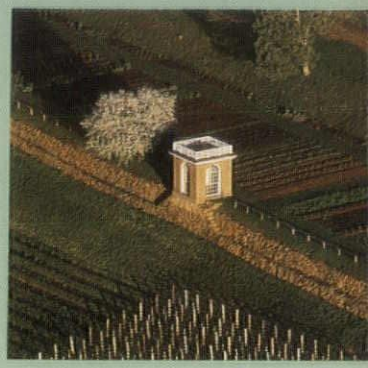
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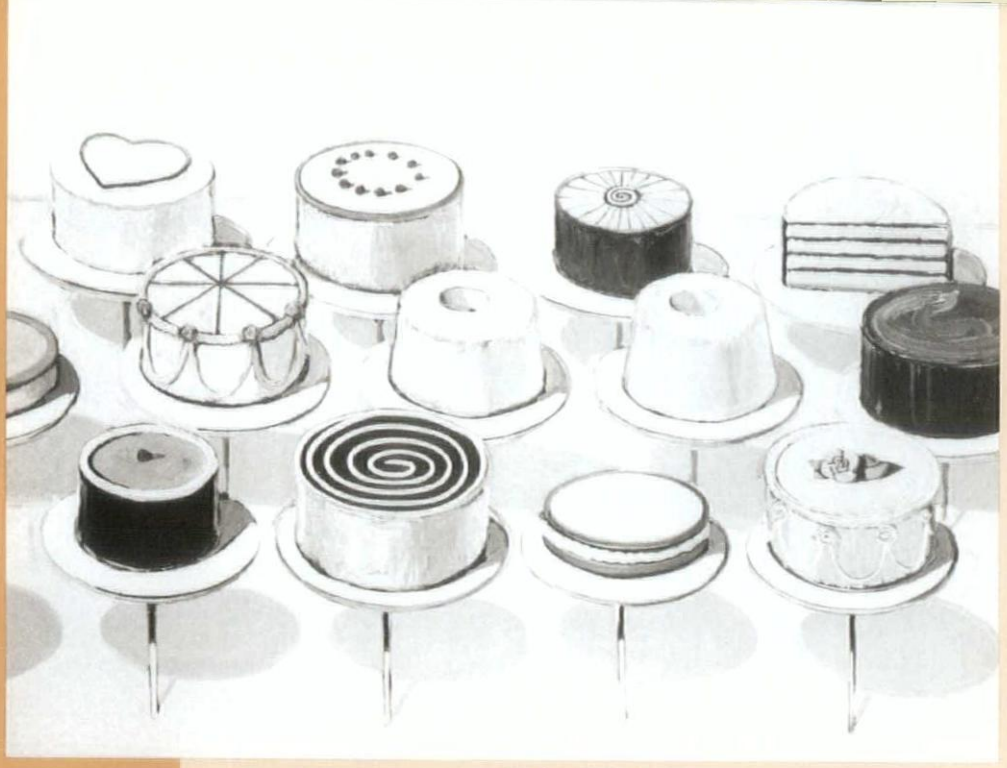
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On the cover: Children's Art Resource Center.
Photo by Prakash Patel.



Courtesy National Gallery of Art

Among the new treasures at the National Gallery: "Cakes," by Wayne Thiebaud.

A Gallery Seasoned Beyond Its Years

A 50th anniversary can, by definition, be cause for celebration. But the National Gallery of Art's 50th is something else again — a truly extraordinary occasion marking the leap from the faint glimmer of an idea into a world-class museum. This sort of thing will never happen again. Why? For starters, because the international art market has tightened immensely. Today's market is more sophisticated, more limited in terms of available first-rate art, and — as Van Gogh's flower paintings so dramatically pointed out — so pricey that even major museums can barely compete in the auction house for major works. Tax laws, which for the moment work to the advantage of public trusts such as the National Gallery, have not helped much in the recent past either.

But the gallery's irrepressible director, J. Carter Brown, has orchestrated this moment into a virtual crescendo of gifts for America. Indeed, the treasures on display in I.M. Pei's decade-old East Building — all of them given expressly for the 50th anniversary — would form the nucleus of an impressive collection in their own right. With more than 320 works dating from the Renaissance to modern times, "Art for the Nation" boasts significant works by Bellini, Brueghel, Toulouse-Lautrec, Cezanne, Homer and Eakins, among many others.

At the entrance to the opening gallery is a huge landscape, "Lake Lucerne" by Albert Bierstadt, which suggests something of both the quality and scope of the show. This painting, which thrust Bierstadt into the artistic limelight — he was an unknown 28-year-old when he painted it and was admitted to the prestigious National Academy of Design soon after the canvas's appearance in an 1858 exhibition — has a story all its own. It had been lost for more than 100 years, only to be rediscovered in 1990 in a town outside Newport, Rhode Island. In many respects, this is vintage Bierstadt — a precursor of the spectacular landscapes he would later compose of the American West, half-imagined, half- real, a figurative representation of the concept of Manifest Destiny that fueled this country's westward expansion. In typical National Gallery fashion, the painting has been carefully restored and dramatically positioned at the entrance to suggest the largesse that follows.

In the galleries beyond are works by Vasari, Rembrandt, Dyke, Manet, Picasso, Pollock, Warhol, Rauschenberg, Klee and Frankenthaler. If you could pick only three works to buy — a game my wife and I play when we imagine for a moment that our last name is Mellon or Harriman — you'd have a tough time of it with this show. Delightfully tough. How could you pass up Fitz Hugh Lane's exquisite "Becalmed off Halfway Rock," Van Gogh's "Roses," Homer's unforgettable schoolmarm in "Blackboard," or any one of 100 other sketches, oils and sculptures?

In conjunction with this show, the National Gallery also has mounted an exhibition memorializing the original museum's chief architect, John Russell Pope, and the wonderful building he created to house the nation's art. "John Russell Pope and the Building of the National Gallery of Art" will certainly be of interest to architects, but on the whole it is so two-dimensional, so unimaginatively configured that it is bound to disappoint anyone familiar with the spectacular drawings and models Pope and his associates created for this heady project. The National Gallery itself, which at the time of its completion in 1941 was one of the largest marble buildings in the world, is far more impressive than the drawings and photographs on its walls. And given the fact that, as recently as 51 years ago, the United States had no national art gallery — and, for that matter, almost no art to put in one — it is nothing less than extraordinary to walk through Pope's classic halls and Pei's airy addition to see what the vision of enlightened souls can do to elevate the spirit.

Douglas McCreary Greenwood

Artmobile Spotlights
The Process of Graphic Design

"People tend to think that graphic design is just about selling a product," says Susan Glasser, coordinator of the Artmobile program at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. But in assembling the newest Artmobile exhibit, "The Art of Graphic Design," Glasser says the museum wanted to counter those assumptions.

She and co-curator Stephen Chovanec mounted a rolling exhibit of logos, books, posters, and signs aimed at broadening public perception of graphic design's varied applications. The intent of the show, through its use of well-known logos for Mobil Oil and Next Computers, is "to get people to stop and come up short, and not take for granted this logo that they're familiar with," Glasser says. Designs displayed in the Artmobile are pulled apart, analyzed, manipulated and rearranged to illustrate the relationship of each element to the whole. Works were selected for a host of reasons, not the least of which was their appropriateness in communicating with students, the Artmobile program's target audience. Posters whose content incorporates prominent figures from history and the arts, for instance, offer a range of possibilities for teachers to work the Artmobile exhibit into their own lesson plans.

Since Artmobiles began traveling in 1953, this is the first to feature graphic design. Says Glasser: "It's a viable art and, particularly with our audience of school children, we can expose them to something their teachers may not even be familiar with." The exhibit also emphasizes graphic design as a career alternative. Indeed, the interior of the Artmobile is arranged to resemble a designer's office, complete with photomontage and drafting table. Through this setting, visitors see effective design as an evolving, collaborative process, from early discussions between client and designer, through creation and refinement of form, to the final multilayered product.

Artmobiles travel to schools and art centers in areas of Virginia that have few other art resources. Each of the museum's three trailers houses one exhibition for a three-year run. An educator travels with each presentation to give tours, workshops and lectures. Virginia sites scheduled for Artmobile visits in May include Farmville, South Boston, South Hill, and Victoria; information is available by calling David Pittman at 804-367-0885. The tour resumes in September.

Stephanie L. Riker

NEXT

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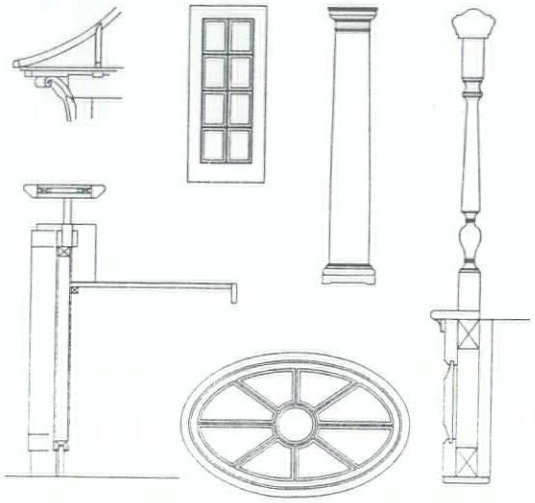
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Graphic designer Paul Rand tested many possibilities before arriving at a finished logo for Next Computers (above, right).

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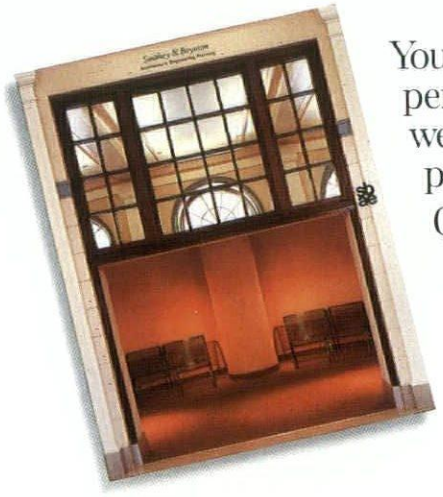
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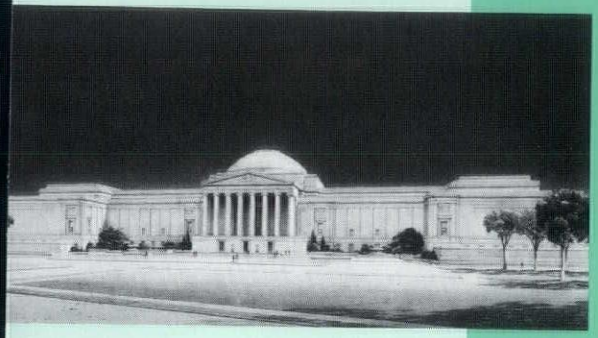
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Pope and the National Gallery
An exhibition tracing the career of architect John Russell Pope and his design for the National Gallery of Art's West Building includes 75 original drawings and an audiovisual program. Pope's other D.C. monuments include the Jefferson Memorial and the National Archives. Through July 7 in the West Building. 202-737-4215.

Mondo Materialis
Leading international architects and interior designers present their visions of building materials of the future. Through Sept. 2 at the National Building Museum. 202-272-2448.

Urbane Academicians
Current thoughts and trends in urban design as explored in U.S. architecture graduate programs. At the Second Street Gallery, Charlottesville, May 3-June 2. 804-977-7284.

The Louvre: A New Century
The Louvre's metamorphosis from fortified medieval castle to a great museum entered through a glass pyramid is examined in original drawings, models, maps, engravings and paintings. Through May 21 at the Octagon, Washington, D.C. 202-626-7300.

Washington: Symbol and City
The evolution of Washington, from L'Enfant's plan through the formation of a local government, defines the city's look. Hands-on design activities are included in this permanent exhibit at the National Building Museum, opening June 7. 202-272-2448.

West Building, National Gallery of Art (completed 1941)

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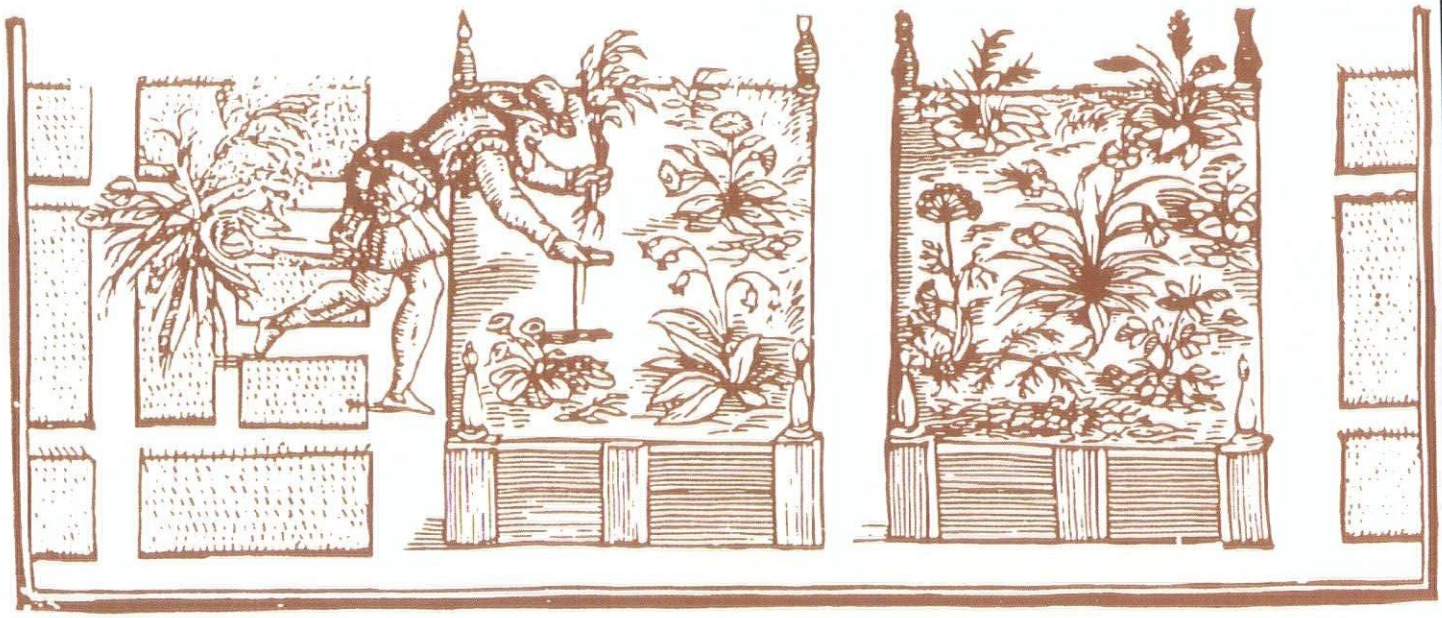
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PLOTTING THE GARDEN

Archaeologist William Kelso sets the standard in landscape archaeology through his pioneering work at Monticello and Poplar Forest.

By Susan Tamulevich

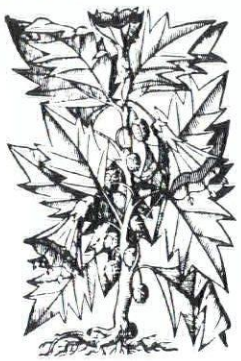
What we have come to know as "historic" gardens, including those created in Williamsburg in the 1920s, were designed more to conform with romantic notions of what gardens were like in the past than to reflect any hard empirical data. Today such gardens are more accurately dubbed "Colonial Revival," for evidence uncovered by garden archaeology has painted a radically different picture of how these early gardens actually may have looked. (Example: Colonial gardens appear to have been less formal than was previously believed, and the variety of plants and their placement much less picturesque.)

Garden archaeology — also called landscape archaeology — was virtually invented in Virginia through the work of one man, archaeologist William Kelso. Kelso began his research in the early 1970s while investigating the grounds at Carter's Grove Plantation near Williamsburg. In those days, he says, no one understood the components that made up a plantation. Kelso began digging to find traces of the old fence lines. "That turned out to be the key to understanding land use on the estate, for the fence lines lead you from one building to the next, eventually forming a grid over the entire property."

The difference between traditional archaeology and landscape archaeology is the difference between thinking in inches and thinking in miles. While conventional archaeology explores human history through investigations of discreet structures or whole towns, landscape archaeology looks at the way individual structures fit into the larger environment, including features such as gardens, hedges, fence lines, auxiliary structures, roads, fields and natural vegetation.

"The problem with dealing with the landscape is that you have huge acreages to deal with," says Kelso, who continues to set the standard in the field with his work at Monticello and Poplar Forest. "There is no way to strip them bare. It takes a lot of study looking at aerial photographs, maps, and other records. And then you've got to decide where would be the best place to make your probe. I've likened the digging to exploratory surgery. What we're trying to find are enough intermittent pieces of something so that we can guess what large piece is there. If we used traditional methods of archaeology, progressing from one point to the next, we'd never finish."

Archaeological finds are typically thought of in terms of bones and arrow heads, carved stone, and shards of pottery — that is, in terms of impervious materials. Such finds have little to do with the ephemeral vegetable matter of the landscape. Says Kelso: "We still are dealing with dead stuff, but the tree roots and even the pollen grains have been preserved — carbonized. The life is gone, only their shape remains."



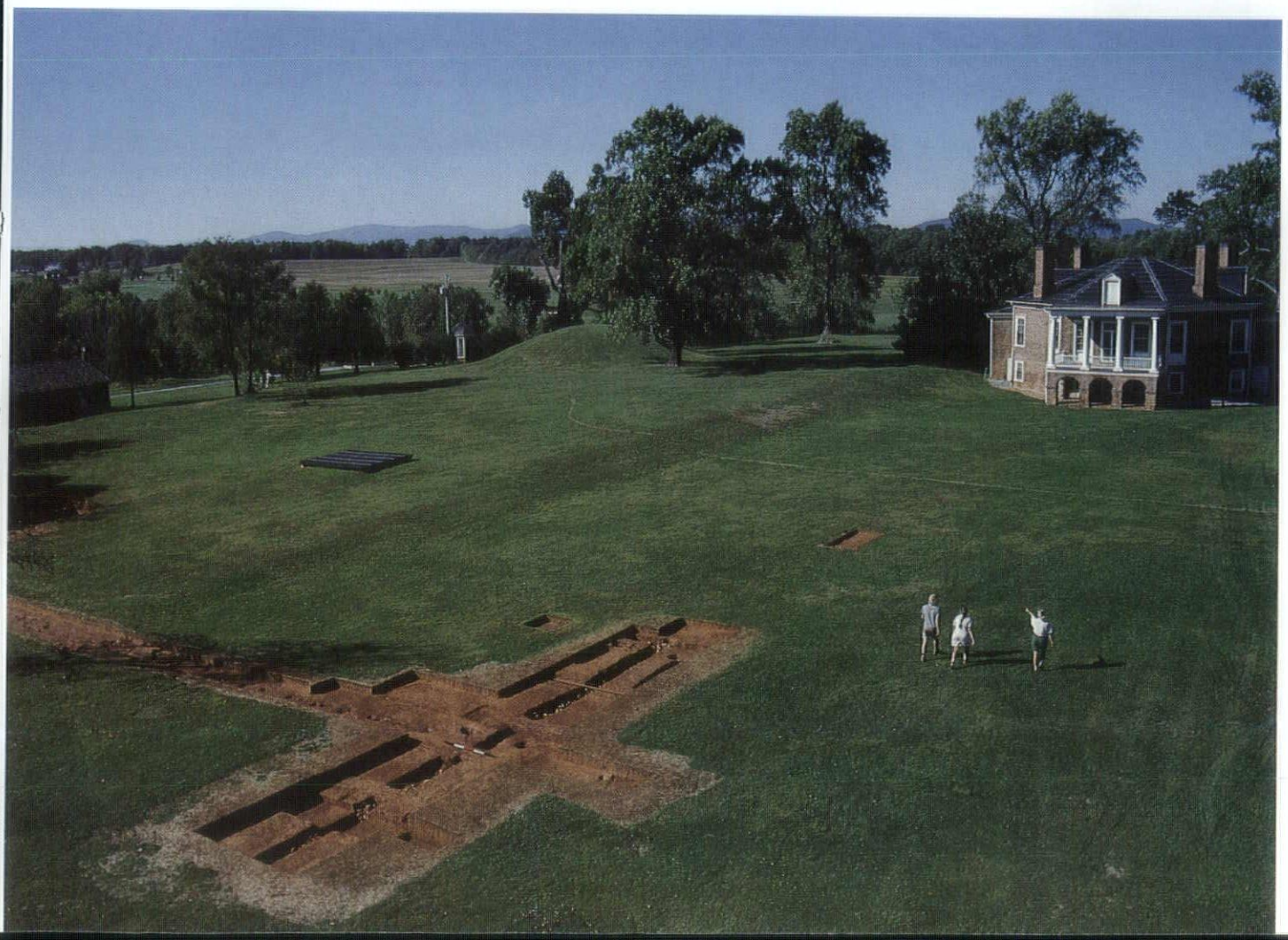
The complexity of garden archaeology was underscored by noted garden historian Wilhelmina Jashemski, professor emeritus at the University of Maryland, in an account of her excavations of the



gardens at Pompeii. There, Jashemski relied on a legion of specialists, including experts in soil, plant spores, pollens, fungi, bacteria, charcoal, birds, mammals, fish and rocks. At Pompeii, Jashemski investigated a number of town and country gardens that had been preserved under volcanic ash since the first century. When she removed the ash cover, planting patterns became visible in the earth. She delicately cleared root cavities of debris, then filled them with cement to produce identifiable contours. On the walls surrounding the small courtyard gardens, she found that the Pompeiians had painted pictures of gardens, presumably in an attempt to make their garden spaces appear larger. The flora and fauna depicted in these images, along with other clues found on the site, were recorded and deciphered by the experts. Jashemski's task was to combine those findings with information from writings of the period and evidence from related sites, resulting in conclusions she discusses in *Earth Patterns: Essays in Landscape Archaeology*, a book edited by Kelso and Rachel Most, an archaeology scholar-in-residence at U.Va.

"Pompeii," says Kelso, "was a perfect time capsule, because you know that all the elements found there are contemporaneous. Normally, the year-to-year changes would be interspersed, so you can't tell where one pattern overlaps into another." At Monticello, Kelso had the benefit of being able to draw on Jefferson's unusually complete records in order to disregard such changes wrought on the landscape by subsequent owners. Kelso's contributions

Landscape architect Allan Brown correctly predicted the location of a former gate on the grounds of Poplar Forest (below).



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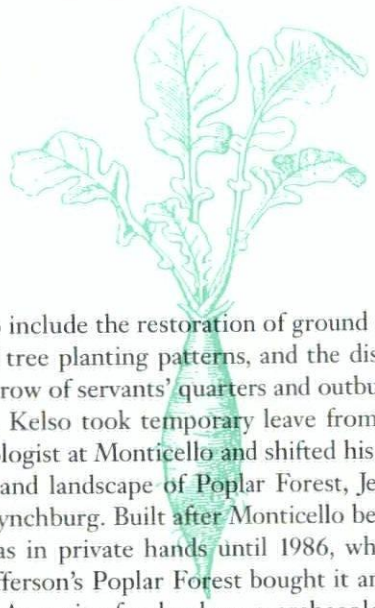
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at Monticello include the restoration of ground contours, planting beds and tree planting patterns, and the discovery of cattle guards and a row of servants' quarters and outbuildings.

In 1989, Kelso took temporary leave from his position as chief archaeologist at Monticello and shifted his attention to the architecture and landscape of Poplar Forest, Jefferson's second home near Lynchburg. Built after Monticello beginning in 1806, the estate was in private hands until 1986, when The Corporation for Jefferson's Poplar Forest bought it and undertook its restoration. As a site for landscape archaeology, Kelso concedes, "Poplar Forest is almost a nightmare. It went from being Jefferson's vacation-retreat villa to a working farm to a residence for a big family to a rustic farm. Now it's in the middle of a housing development. These changes all had their impact underground; it is now pretty impossible to sort them out."

While Poplar Forest's records were not quite so complete as Monticello's, landscape architect C. Allan Brown scoured the archival material to devise a likely scheme of the grounds. Dig here, Brown said, and you'll find a gate. "We dug there, and we found a gate exactly at that spot, and I thought, this is going to be fun," Kelso says. "Then everything started changing. We didn't find things that should have been there. On the other hand, we found an enormous garden the size of a football field that Allan hadn't expected to be there. This garden is very squared away, very balanced, more traditional than the gardens at Monticello."

Brown believes that Jefferson tried to transform the small octagonal house at Poplar Forest into a Palladian villa by planting trees in a way that suggested a wing at each end of the house. "Jefferson never actually says in his papers that this is what he was trying to do," says Kelso. "Apparently, however, two columns of mulberry trees formed a covered arcade leading from the house to two mounds. The mounds were planted with weeping willows at the top, and with Jefferson aspens in a ring at the base. These mounds and trees might have represented little temples or pavilions — almost an organic architecture."

This spring Kelso wraps up his preliminary work at Poplar Forest, which he calls "Jefferson's whimsical fantasy bubble." In the summer he will begin work at Shadwell, the estate of Peter Jefferson, Thomas's father. That house is scheduled to open to the public in 1993.

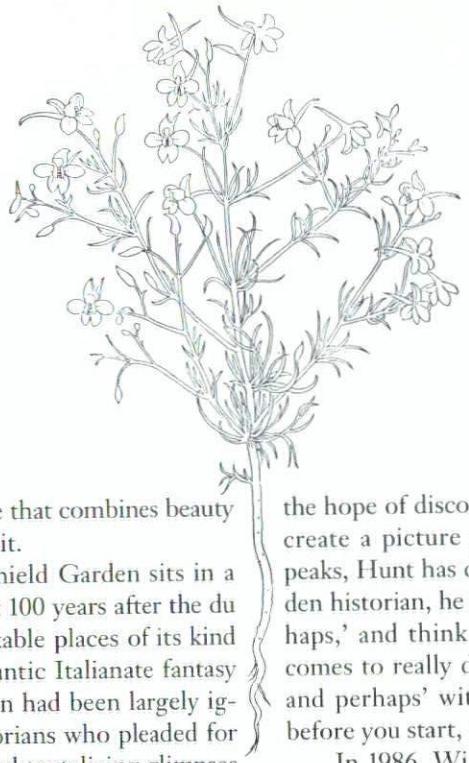
Most of Kelso's projects — indeed, most of the landscape investigations conducted in the U.S. — are located in the Mid-Atlantic region's coastal plain. This is so because the earliest colonial settlements and the earliest gardens are found here. It is also because of the proximity of practitioners and teachers

such as Kelso and Jashemski. In addition to Carter's Grove and the Jefferson sites, a number of important gardens have been discovered in the region since the early 1970s. These include a circa 1690 garden discovered at Bacon's Castle in Surry County, Virginia; the gardens at Old Salem, a Moravian town founded in central North Carolina in 1766; and the mid-18th century Calvert Orangery in Annapolis. Several of these gardens have now been restored to their original states.

One of the most unusual of the Mid-Atlantic sites is on the grounds of the Hagley Foundation in Wilmington, Delaware. Here, side by side, are the E.I. du Pont French Garden, beautifully restored from the early 19th century, and the 1920s Crowninshield Garden, a promising site for future garden research. The French Garden, now a public attraction, is a painstaking restoration of the first du Pont garden in America. A neat French-style *potager*, or kitchen garden, it was built in 1820 but was abandoned 70 years later when the family moved. Both archaeological evidence and du Pont's detailed records were used to restore the site, which now contains only historically correct varieties of fruits, vegetables and flowers (including the brilliant Oriental Poppy said to have been introduced to America by E.I du Pont) as well as a virtuoso display of espalier — trees and shrubs that have been trained to grow in particular forms. To assure historical accuracy, a Czech pomologist, or fruit tree expert, was brought in to recreate intricate Belgian fences, vertical and horizontal cordons, a pleached arcade, and a border of trees trained *en quenouille* (in the shape of a cone). All are

Archaeologist Kelso's contributions at Monticello include the restoration of ground contours and the estate's vegetable garden (below).





traditional varieties of espalier, a technique that combines beauty of form with the production of perfect fruit.

Just a few steps away, the Crowninshield Garden sits in a state of genteel decay. Constructed almost 100 years after the du Pont *potager*, it is one of the most remarkable places of its kind ever created in the U.S. A wild and romantic Italianate fantasy complete with classical "ruins," the garden had been largely ignored for decades, except by garden historians who pleaded for its preservation. Today, visitors are allowed tantalizing glimpses into the garden, but nothing more. The Crowninshield Garden remains closed to the public, its fate uncertain.

Prior to the rise of garden archaeology, garden historians conducted most of their research in rare book libraries, where they could peruse vintage herbals (early books on plants and herbs) and leather-bound garden treatises. One of the leading horticultural libraries in the world is at the Center for Garden Studies at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C. The center serves as a place for research and site of an annual public symposium related to garden history. This year's symposium, "Regional Garden Design in the U.S.," will take place May 17-18.

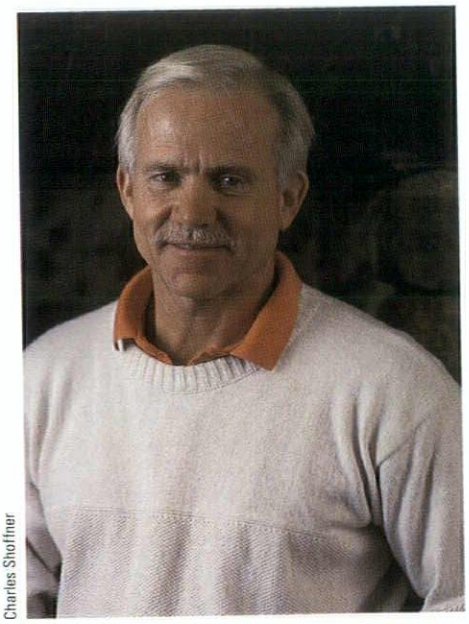
John Dixon Hunt, the center's director, is a garden scholar and authority on the gardens of Venice. While a great fan of Kelso's work, Hunt cautions that the information provided by archaeologists is, at best, limited to two dimensions. "They can discover where a hole was located, and probably whether the hole was from a tree or a fence. What they will not be able to tell you is what the tree was, or whether the fence was two feet or ten feet tall. You get a certain amount of layout information from archaeology, but the very things that you want to know most in gardening — the spatial and three-dimensional relationships — of these, archaeology can tell you nothing."

Hunt finds that in some instances archaeology is an unfeasible alternative to scholarly research. Case in point: He is planning to rehabilitate a site in Venice where a notable 17th-century botanical garden is known to be buried beneath an equally important 19th-century romantic garden. "It seems a sacrilege to remove one garden, much of which still exists, in the hope of discovering traces of an earlier garden," he says. To create a picture of how these two gardens appeared at their peaks, Hunt has devoted months to researching them. As a garden historian, he says, "I can sit at my desk and 'maybe and perhaps,' and think about what I might do. But when the time comes to really do something in that garden, you can't 'maybe and perhaps' with a spade. You have to decide on your plan before you start, or else you could do a lot of damage."

In 1986, William Kelso organized at Monticello and U.Va. the first conference devoted to both ancient and modern landscape archaeological research. Last year he spearheaded a second session attended by both national and international landscape archaeologists. "Right now," Kelso says, "the field is still nebulous. It was clear [at the conference] that no one knew the parameters of what we were talking about."

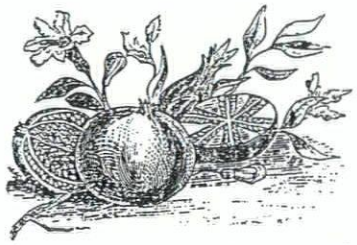
Undoubtedly these uncertainties will dwindle as the field develops. Hunt, for one, says interest in gardens from many sources is on the verge of exploding. Aging baby boomers, for example, have been turning to gardening in droves, providing a market for the current rash of sumptuous books, television specials and gardening catalogs. Moreover, Washington public television station WETA is currently developing a series on the history of gardens, and *Garden Design* magazine has just revamped its look along the lines of a luxury homes publication.

Landscape archaeology, however, encompasses more than just flower beds. "Landscape archaeologists are looking to reconstruct the cultural impact on the *total* environment," says Kelso. For him and other pioneers in the field, gardens are only the first step toward the goal of "expanding out toward the horizon, as far as the eye can see."



Charles Shoffner

William Kelso (above) has been inventing the standards for garden archaeology as the tasks facing him required new expertise.



Susan Tamulevich is a Washington based writer whose article on public art appeared in the January/February issue of Inform.

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Taking the Team Approach

By Edwin Slipek, Jr.

A multidisciplinary panel of advisors, led by VMDO Architects, combines wits to make a space "for kids only" at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond.

The wintry scenario was something right out of the movie classic "White Christmas": a half-dozen talented people sequester themselves during a heavy snowstorm to collectively spin magic from a challenging situation. This cast, instead, included architects, a recognized art educator, a performance artist, and education and operations types from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Meanwhile, the rest of the museum and most of Richmond was shut down as the team assembled to brainstorm ideas for transforming a modest and somewhat awkward space into a unique asset — the Children's Art Resource Center at the museum. ● Open for more than a year now, the center is a critical success with architects (winner of a 1990 Award for Excellence in Architecture from the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects), a functional pleasure to the folks who administer it and a hit with the kids who use it. "As soon as children look through the glass doors they know the space is for them," says Mary Wayne Fritzsche, manager of the museum's office of education. "Even those who can't read the sign are drawn to it — visually it works." ● Fritzsche and others involved in the conception of the center credit the collaborative process as critical to the design and operation of the center. "That the center is everybody's success speaks well for the process," she says. ● VMDO Architects of Charlottesville had emphasized the need for collaboration when architects were being interviewed for the job. "When the project was advertised, we knew the job was small and that we might lose our shirts on it," says G. Lawson Drinkard III, the former VMDO partner who spearheaded the project. "But we saw the project as allowing us a rare opportunity to put into practice some ideas we had been developing for some time." ● The prospect of creating a "jewel" at the museum had great appeal for VMDO, whose work in the educational arena has ranged from elementary schools to university projects. "Coming to grips with the frustrating architecture business and educational architecture is no treat," muses Drinkard. "In the '20s and '30s, schools were places that people looked to as sources of civic pride. It was this quality that the firm was seeking to recapture with the design of the Children's Art Resource Center." ● One of the first persons VMDO sought to place on the advisory team was Amy Brook Snider, chairwoman of art education at Pratt Institute. In 1988, Snider had presented a paper to a group of architects entitled "Schools Without Architects or



Ingenious "Murphy tables," each with a crutchlike stainless steel leg (above), fold up into the walls when not in use.

Art Teachers: A Room of Their Own." In it, she held out little hope that the regimented design of most classrooms would ever change. "Even good modern design cannot change or conceal the essential authoritarian nature of the structures," she wrote. But Snider suggested that students in art classes should be allowed to create their own work spaces—essentially to establish personal comfort zones as artists do in their studios with favorite objects, images or postcards that might inspire future paintings or films. By coincidence, Drinkard had read a copy of Snider's paper and was moved by it. So he tracked her down and invited her to Richmond. Free-spirited performer Jack Glover, an elementary art teacher who had been active in community efforts to create a children's center at the museum, was also asked to join the team.

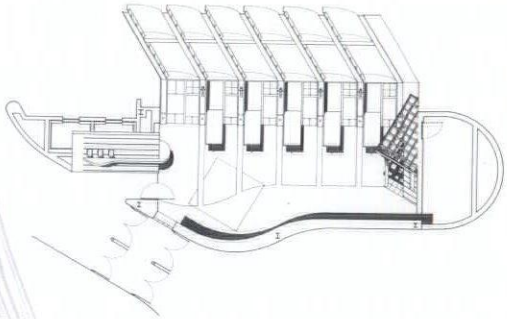
So on a snowy Friday morning, the group went to work, armed with a six-page statement of purpose written by the museum staff and blessed by museum director Paul Perrot. Among the items on its wish list, the museum wanted a year-round facility that could be used by children and parents for weekend and summer studio art classes and for weekday workshops for school groups. The area was to serve, too, as an orientation center, and it had to be equipped for audio-visual presentations and occasionally serve as a student gallery. Bottom line, the mission was to create a space where the museum's collection could be interpreted to its youngest audience — and done so by involving the students. All this in 1100 square feet! ● "Nobody was interested in doing the obvious," says architect Daniel Simpson, Jr., the project designer. "Amy and Jack acted as the consciences of the group by striking down any stupid architectural cliches." Fritzsche credits Snider with bringing a fresh perspective and new insights about art education to an institution about which she had very little prior knowledge. ● Rather than use the image of classroom, Snider asked, why not imagine the space as an artist's studio? That would encourage the children to think and work like artists. "Jack felt strongly that children's art was not something to be relegated to the refrigerator door, but taken as legitimate," recalls Fritzsche. "He believed the design of the center should reflect this quality." ● All ideas were welcome. But when Glover suggested using cardboard in the design of pyramidal easels that would double as free-standing forms when not in use, a museum staff member couldn't hold back. "This *is* the Virginia Museum," she blurted, alluding to the museum's image of restrained elegance.



An overhead trellis at the end of the room and a shift in the floor pattern define a separate space-within-a-space – a child-scale wash area.

That the Children's Art Resource Center would be housed in a 1930s Georgian Revival landmark was never far from the planning team's thoughts. ● After all ideas had been heard, the architects reported back the next day with a handful of conceptual ideas that incorporated most of what the museum had hoped to accomplish. The museum's buildings and grounds people joined the process at that point to discuss structural and budgetary limitations inherent in creating a new space within an older structure. This is where reality entered the proceedings. *"No, a window could not be created by knocking through an existing outer wall."*

Art education for young people has been part of the Virginia Museum's mission since its founding in 1934. But, until recently, the unquestionable highlight of any child's visit to the museum was a glimpse of a partially unraveled Egyptian mummy whose lifeless eyes stared eerily into oblivion. With this ancient personage removed from young eyes, the museum's education staff sought to accomplish at the resource center something equally as memorable, but not an oddity. Team members agreed that textures, materials and colors could, in themselves, serve teaching purposes — that plaster, wood and metal surfaces could be tactile



and beautiful. They also swore off hackneyed childlike images and colors, vowing instead to create real architecture. ● The result is a single elongated room that has the compartmentalized feel of an old-fashioned hardware store. Simpson calls one of the long walls the operable or active wall. It is divided from floor to ceiling with bays of shelves for art supplies. Custom-built "Murphy" tables, when lowered from the same walls, are complemented by pint-sized Aalto stools. Direct-lighting fixtures with an industrial flair augment the indirect lighting placed in the ceiling. ● Opposite the tables is an undulating wall that serves alternately as a bulletin board or backdrop for performances. Often it is simply left blank — a soothing counterpoint to the hyperactivity that sometimes characterizes the room. The architects successfully overcame the limitations of height, existing structure, and a lack of natural light by dividing the ceiling into a series of arched bays that create a feeling of canopied airiness. At one end of the room, the ceiling was lowered to shelter a child-scale wash area. To the adult observer a distinct *Through the Looking Glass* quality prevails, suggesting that Lewis Carroll might have envisioned this 120 years before.

And the shortcomings? Natural light would have been ideal, of course, and additional storage has had to be found elsewhere in the building. But the space is self-contained so that a teacher can walk in, switch on the lights, and have everything at her fingertips. The center also has held up beautifully during its first year of operation — a tribute to wise choices of materials and finishes. ● But it is the collaborative process to which participants attribute the center's ultimate success. "In the practice of architecture there are consultants and there are clients. But too often we architects will talk with both and then basically hear what we want to," says Drinkard. "In a true collaboration, two plus two equals more than four — a true collaboration can inspire all involved to do better creative thinking." ● The museum's Fritzsche lauds the creation of a space that is stimulating without being overbearing. "The center works not as an end in itself, but as a point of departure to explore the entire museum," she says. "VMDO took all our ideas and crystallized them into excellent design. It was a true and total collaboration in that the ideas were meshed so well that there is no sense of who suggested what."

Edwin Slipek, Jr. is a Richmond freelance writer.



The art center's irregular form is given order by the strong rhythm expressed in the floor, storage wall and ceiling (above). The drawing at top, shown like a box unfolding, emphasizes the same relationships.



A Proper Accounting

The traditional forms of a Norfolk office building influence the design elements of new accounting offices for Peat Marwick Main & Co. by architects Hanbury Evans Newill Vlattas.



Bleached mahogany paneling and a custom-designed reception desk set the tone for the firm's reception area (above). A small glassed-in conference room (top) is conveniently situated at each end of the main corridor.

ace



Photos: Tamara Mischenko

Even in the angst-filled days before income tax deadline, calm prevails in the Norfolk accounting offices of Peat Marwick Main & Co. It's not that fewer papers are being shuffled, but more that a thoughtful blend of art and functional efficiency helps calm the ripples of tension.

A contemporary interior with traditional overtones keeps the firm well-grounded on the 20th and 21st floors of Dominion Tower, a 26-story Post-Modern building overlooking the Elizabeth River. Employees and clients enjoy a growing collection of paintings and sculptures that punctuate sight lines through the offices. Classically-inspired columns and arches on the building's exterior have been brought inside by architect Stephen Wright, head of the interior design studio at Hanbury Evans Newill Vlattas in Norfolk. "As much as possible, the interior should reflect the building," says Wright. He and designer Rosemary Hossli revamped and expanded office space for about 100 employees of the accounting firm to accommodate their style of working in teams.

The loudest echo resounds in an impressive elevator lobby. Just off the 21st-floor elevators are two square ceiling coffers that taper upward to a pyramidal point. Hanging from the coffers are dish-shaped alabaster pendant lamps. Their mirror image appears below in the carpeting, which is bordered by verde marble. The border provides a visual link to green faux-marble columns on the opposite side of the plush reception area.

A grid motif unifies the design at many scales. In the reception area, heavy Honduran mahogany paneling, bleached to achieve a lighter appearance and feel, is applied in squares that find their equivalents at many points throughout the office. Pedestals for the columns, for example, feature inlaid squares of brass. "We wanted to give it a sense of permanence and a sense of tradition without being 18th century reproduction," says Wright. The room's rigid geometry is relieved by overstuffed seating and a curvaceous mahogany reception desk custom-designed by Wright. Ebony inlays with brass accents repeat the grid theme.

Marbleized columns also flank the entrances to a pair of small conference rooms, each placed at the end of a central corridor. Their single glass walls allow outside light to flood the hallways and keep the interior spaces from seeming so cloistered. Corridors are further brightened by wall sconces. "Our people like what they see," says Gary L. Strickfaden, senior partner at the accounting firm. "The opportunity to see outside to outside through the building adds to the aesthetic, the openness and the good feeling people have."

Aimee Cunningham

The author is Home editor of The Virginian-Pilot *and* The Ledger-Star *in Norfolk.*

Geometry Unbound

The order and clarity of pharmaceutical chemistry give rise to metaphors explored in the Rockville, Maryland, headquarters for the U.S. Pharmacopeial Convention by Kerns Group Architects.



Photos: Kenneth Wyner

In his early thinking about the design for a new headquarters for the United States Pharmacopeial Convention, the organization that sets standards for the pharmaceutical industry, architect Brian Frickie began to envision the building in terms of a geode — hard and crusty on the outside, crystalline and bright on the inside. "The more we tested the idea, the more the analogy seemed consistent with the way the building was organized," says Frickie. "It wasn't so much us imposing an order on the building, but it was an order that came to us."

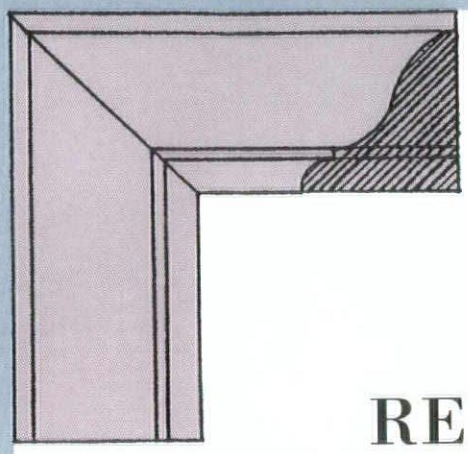
The clients had come to meetings armed with a list of "images" they wanted the building to project. Among them were words such as quality-conscious, progressive, organized and forward-looking. The organization's scientific thrust only further encouraged the design of a building that prompted associations with structure, investigation and experimentation. Such ideas were critical in the decision-making about the building's lobby and reception area, where first — and lasting — impressions of USP would be formed. Here, the metaphor of the geode comes most forcefully into play: a triangular piece is separated from the primary mass of the building, its interior finished in a reflective palette of materials. Walls of glass, a perforated alminum ceiling, a chrome-and-glass stair and a polished black-and-gray terrazzo floor are configured in units of geometry that progressively diminish, a gesture meant to symbolize the breaking down of chemical compounds into their basic elements.

The lobby stair rises through the center of a narrow atrium that slices through the building, transforming what would otherwise be mundane corridors into dramatic balconies. For anyone coming to attend a meeting in the building, the passage through this light-filled atrium is a fitting prelude to entering the main conference room, which is more akin to a chapel than a place for committee meetings. That comparison flatters Frickie, who says he thought the space needed a sense of reverence, importance and awe. "Our goal was not only to meet their needs to have a meeting space, but to give their directors some place to transcend the day-to-day responsibilities they have," he says. It is clearly the building's most important room, rich with mahogany paneling and a barrel-vaulted ceiling that rises two-stories tall. Overscaled bookcases, heavy columns and windows that rise the full height of the room all reinforce the sense of a place that is larger than life. Yet the effect is skillfully achieved by manipulating a dimensional grid that appears consistently through the building and stays true to the theme of representing an industry in which measurement and precision are the watchwords.

Vernon Mays



Building dimensions are regulated by an organizing grid that finds expression as a mahogany frame in the vaulted ceiling of the main conference room (above). Reflective materials and geometric patterns in the lobby (facing page) reinforce the notion of crystalline purity.



REPUBLICAN SPLENDOR

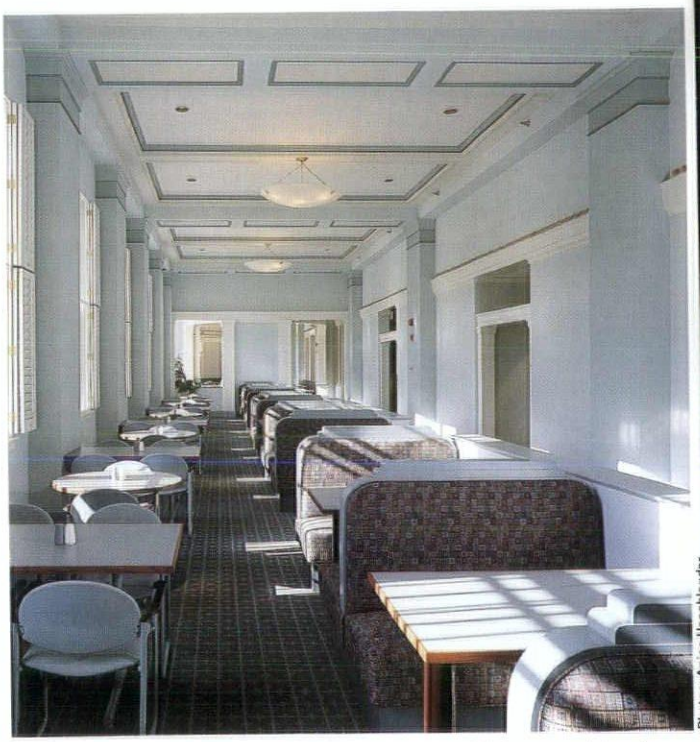
In converting former offices into a new employee cafeteria at the Treasury Annex in Washington, D.C., designers at Cooper-Lecky Architects draw on the classical language of the original landmark building.

When designing a new employee cafeteria for the Treasury Annex Building, Cooper-Lecky Architects delved into musty corners searching for a reference to what the building's original architect, Cass Gilbert, might have intended for the 1917 Beaux Arts landmark. But, after 70 years of "updates," the building's bare interiors revealed little of their original splendor. To recreate a semblance of the building's classical character, project architect James Cummings and a team of designers studied Gilbert's nearby Chamber of Commerce building. Yet few clues to Gilbert's intent were found. "Where none existed, we carefully created them — always mindful of what he might have done," says Cummings.

That care is clearly evident in the completed cafeteria. Entering the dining spaces, a visitor immediately appreciates what seems a careful restoration. On closer inspection, appreciation turns to respect for the architects' skill in creating a space that belies its modern origins. "We struggled with the issues of performing a strict restoration versus designing something shockingly new," says Cummings. The end product relies on modern craftsmanship and detailing, but takes its inspiration from an earlier era.

By the time Cooper-Lecky got involved, Gilbert's light and open space had been devastated by exposed mechanical ductwork and modular ceilings that ruined the scale of the room and blocked much of the natural light. These latter-day "improvements" were torn out to reveal soaring ceilings and grand windows. The architects then carved a series of dining areas from the room's large volume, using existing columns as natural divisions, inserting new columns for rhythm, and crowning the spaces with cornice bands. A rounded partition in one corner of the main dining room inspired the use of sweeping curves — defined by banquette seating at floor level and cornice bands overhead — at each end of the rectangular room. An otherwise ordinary space alongside the main dining room benefits from being raised, and is given special definition by spaces at each end with vaulted ceilings.

Color and light make a perfect marriage in the cafeteria. Strategically placed modern fixtures and artful indirect lighting



Photos: Anice Hoachlander

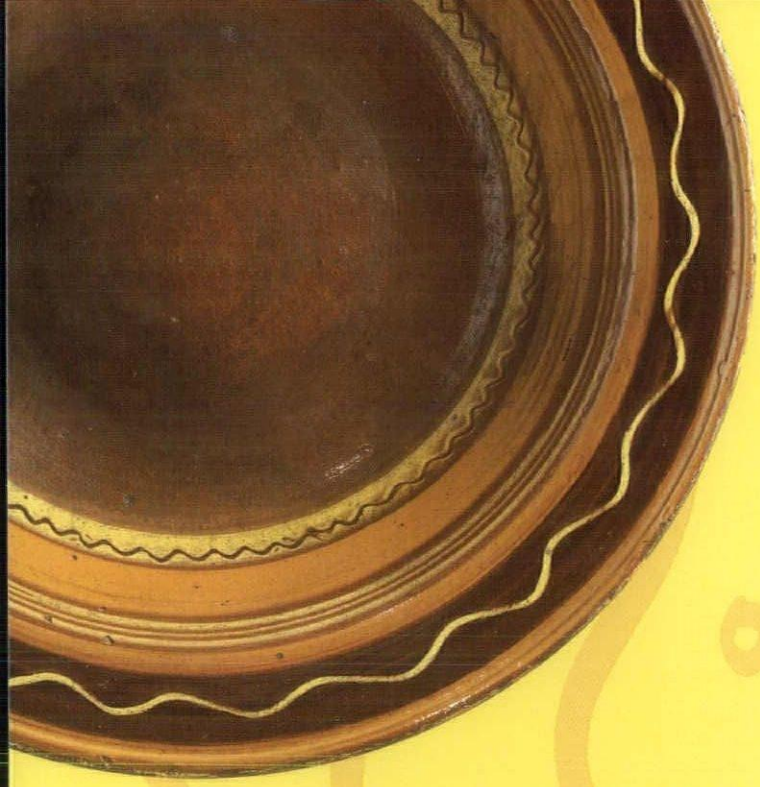
Formerly open office space was carved into several dining areas (above) at the Treasury Annex. The main dining room (facing page) is unified by a cornice band that continues the curve of the wall, even where no wall exists.

foster the sense that the generous windows are the sole source of illumination. Furnishings, selected by Treasury Department interior designer Suzonna Moore, punctuate the space with deeper tones of the wall colors. The carpet, however, was custom-designed for the job. Its intricate pattern of interlocking grids echoes a window grille Cummings designed for other areas of the building. Adapting the grille design to the carpeting was an evolution that occurred not on paper, but on the cafeteria floor. "I designed it on my hands and knees," says Cummings. "It was a lot like building inside a large-scale model."

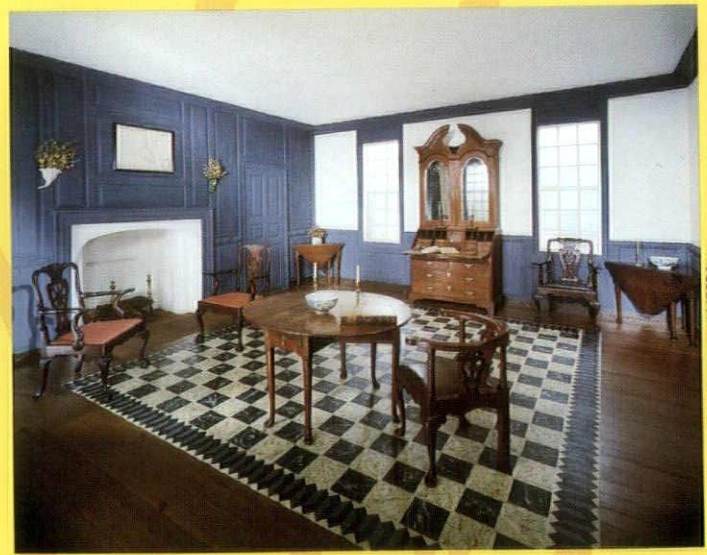
Elena Marcheso Moreno

The author is a freelance writer in McLean, Virginia.





Bowl, Hagerstown, Maryland, 1805-10. The Shenandoah Valley from Pennsylvania to Virginia had a rich pottery tradition. Hagerstown, where a number of potters who had trained in the German tradition settled after 1750, was one of the early pottery-producing centers. This lead-glazed earthenware mixing bowl, with the flavor characteristic of early Hagerstown ceramics, is slip-decorated – a method by which a liquid clay, called slip, is colored and applied to the surface of the vessel as ornament. It was made by Peter Bell, born in 1775 to a German immigrant. Three of his sons, and many more of his grandsons, were potters too.



Photos: Wesley Stewart, Courtesy of MESDA

Most objects are exhibited in period rooms, such as the parlor (above) whose architectural details were removed from Cherry Grove, a house built in 1760 on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

By Vernon Mays

Who would have guessed that one man's humble ambition, quietly brought to life in an abandoned grocery store, could spawn one of the leading decorative arts museums in the country? Yet that's exactly what happened at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts — more familiarly known as MESDA — located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Regulars like to call it "Frank's place," in deference to founder and former director Frank L. Horton, but under new leadership the museum is striving to shake off its image of institutional reserve and actively promote its recognition as a key resource for information on the cultural diversity of the early South.

"Before this museum was created, there was little recognition in the scholarly community that anything of worth occurred in the decorative arts in the South," says Madelyn Moeller, MESDA's current director. But under Horton's guidance a wellspring of historical information was amassed on the careers of artisans in the rural backwater and in urban centers such as Baltimore, Norfolk, Alexandria and Charleston. The keystone of the collection is the museum's research center. It assists not only with the identification of southern objects, but with the understanding of how and why these objects came into being. Researchers contributing to the catalog of craftsmen, for example, are engaged in a systematic reading of newspapers and court records from all the counties within the seven-state region that defines MESDA's scope. Want to know how many silversmiths worked in Alexandria between 1740 and 1760? They can tell you at MESDA. "It's a tremendous resource of the economic history of the South," says Moeller.

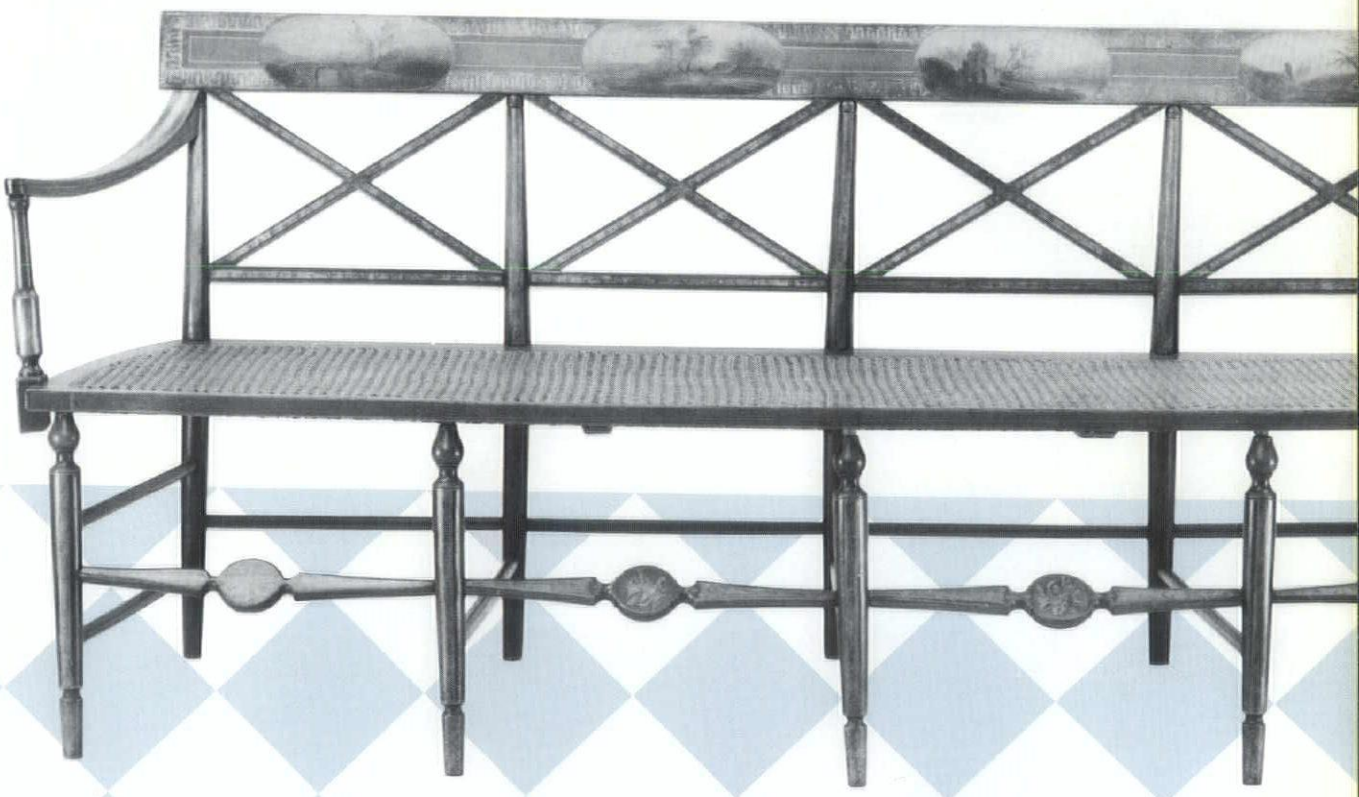
Even though the museum and its research library are equipped for serious study, there is just as much to interest the casual visitor, who can enjoy a guided tour through the sequence of 19 period rooms and six galleries in which much of the collection is displayed. The rooms not only detail the chronological progression of decorative arts in the South through 1820, but they illuminate remarkable differences in material culture among three subregions defined by the cities and towns clustered around the Chesapeake Bay, the cities and towns scattered along the Carolina and Georgia coastal plain, and the communities in the mountainous back country.

Since its beginnings in 1965, MESDA — which resides on the grounds of Old Salem, the restored Moravian village founded some 200 years earlier — has been expanded several times to accommodate its growing collection. The sampling of objects illustrated here merely hints at the museum's range of artifacts, which includes furniture, silverware, glass, textiles, ceramics, metalware and paintings. MESDA's exhibits are, in essence, aimed at presenting a meaningful cross-section of social history – not misleading visitors with what the museum's own newsletter called "a misty-eyed, moss-hung, bejulep'd, and heroic-porticoed voyage through the antebellum South."

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Settee, Baltimore, 1805-10. Made mostly of poplar, this red-and-gold decorated settee has a cane seat and walnut seat frame characteristic of Baltimore "fancy" furniture, as such pieces were known. Four painted panels adorn the top rail of the back, and musical instruments grace the four front rails. Although japanned furniture was being made in Philadelphia and New York in the early 19th century, Baltimore furniture makers produced it on a scale and with a style unequaled by others. Early 19th century Baltimore chairmakers and painters such as John and Hugh Finlay based their work on classical designs from the drawing books of Thomas Sheraton and G. Hepplewhite. Sheraton's 1803 *Cabinet Dictionary* included instructions for painting and drawing lines on chairs, and the Baltimore painters followed these techniques of applying polychrome and gilt decoration freehand over a colored ground with a lavish use of varnish. This piece has not been formally attributed to the Finlays, but it shares decorative techniques the Finlays were known to use.

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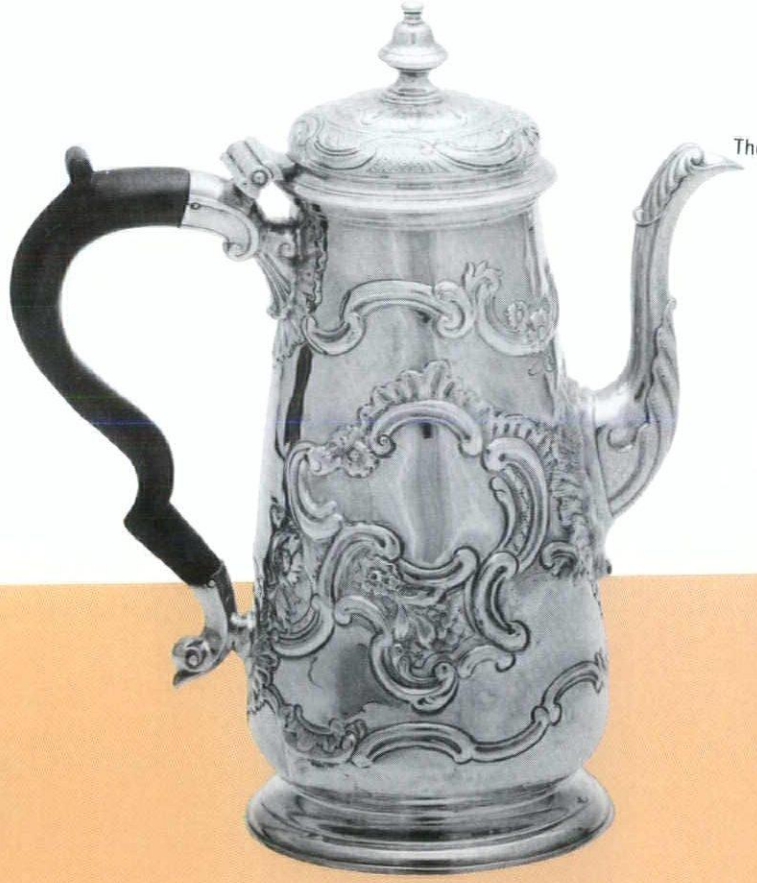
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Decorated chest, Shenandoah County, Virginia, possibly 1795-1810. Most surviving southern furniture with painted decoration is from western Virginia. In that region, such furniture was understood to be "Dutch," that is, *Deutsch* or German. Perhaps the best known Shenandoah Valley decorator is Johannes Spitler of Shenandoah County, whose work is highly individualized and easy to identify. Most of his designs were compass-drawn, which is common for American decorated chests. This particular Spitler chest is made of yellow pine. Virginia's most extensive school of decorated furniture is associated with Wythe County in the southern highlands. Four distinct groups of Wythe chests have been identified; most are painted with three arched-head panels containing pots of tulips or similar flowers.



These captions are exc

Coffee pot, Charleston, 1750-60. One of the finest known examples of southern Rococo silver, this coffee pot by silversmith Alexander Petrie is one of only a handful of surviving examples of southern chased work. Most remaining pieces of its sort hailed from Baltimore and Annapolis makers. The pot is of seamed construction, with a vertical joint located under the handle sockets — a technique that was not unusual on the basically straight-bodied pots made in the George II style — and it bore castings, including the hinge, spout and foot ring, that were common to other Petrie pots. Petrie died in 1768, having acquired a fortune from land speculation and an extensive lending operation, not unusual for a colonial silversmith.

ons that will appear in MESDA's new catalog, set for publication later this year.



Bookcase, Charleston, 1765-75. This mahogany and cypress library bookcase is strikingly similar to one depicted in Thomas Chippendale's *Director*, one of several influential books of patterns for furniture design. Chippendale's design was followed with one significant exception: to fit proportionately within the tall rooms of Charleston dwellings, the piece was increased in height by making the oval panels at the base more vertical. Bookcases were being sold in Charleston as early as the 1730s.

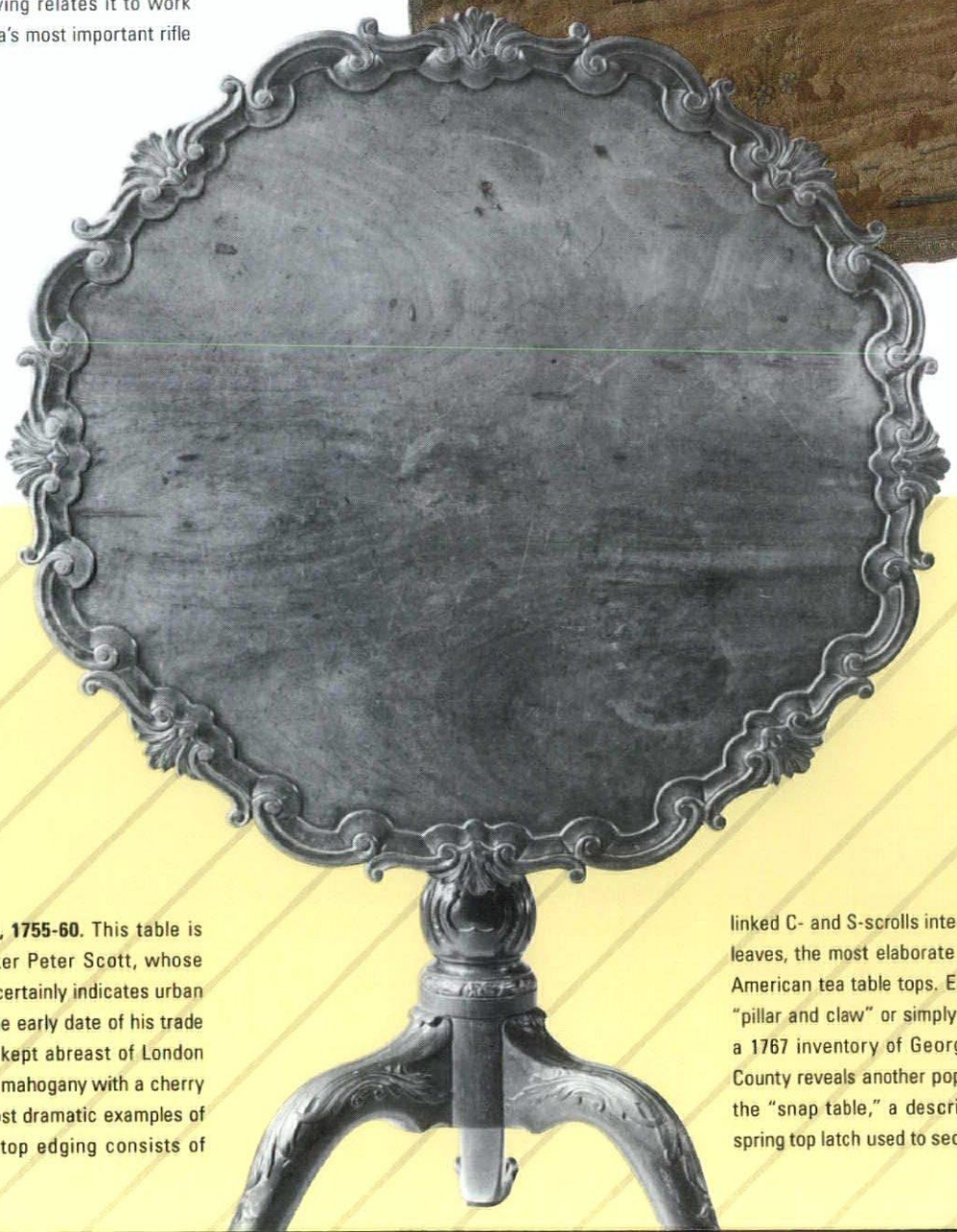


Collection Dallas Museum of Art (on loan)

Armchair, Norfolk, 1803. This mahogany chair is one of a dozen for which General John Hartwell Cocke was billed $120 by Norfolk cabinetmaker James Woodward, who first advertised for journeymen in Norfolk in 1793. In 1795, he announced that he had "the best workmen of Philadelphia and New York, and from Europe" and listed an inventory of chairs, sideboards, various tables, sofas and four-poster beds. Indeed, the style of this chair is closely related to seating being made at the same time in New York. By 1813, Woodward had opened a shop in Richmond, too. The size of his inventory normally would suggest that Woodward imported northern furniture in addition to producing his own, but his establishment was so large that he possibly made furniture for display, as well — a fact that would have set him apart from most southern cabinetmakers.



Longrifle, Wythe/Pulaski County, 1795-1800. Few American arts demonstrate a stronger development of regional style than gunmaking. The German settlements of western Maryland and Virginia contained the largest numbers of gunsmiths in the South. Following their European heritage, southern longrifles of the pre-Revolutionary period tended to have ample buttstock proportions, with buttplates that had relatively little curve and widths of about two inches. Though made later, this southwestern Virginia longrifle shows much of the architectural fullness characteristic of earlier pieces. Stocked in maple, the rifle has iron furniture. Iron mounts, preferred in the southern Appalachian region, were more expensive to produce than the cast brass mounts usually found elsewhere. This rifle's carving relates it to work made in Winchester, Virginia's most important rifle making center.



Tea table, Williamsburg, 1755-60. This table is attributed to cabinetmaker Peter Scott, whose diverse repertoire almost certainly indicates urban British training. Despite the early date of his trade history in Virginia, Scott kept abreast of London styles. This table, made of mahogany with a cherry pedestal, is among the most dramatic examples of his work. Its pattern of top edging consists of linked C- and S-scrolls interspersed with acanthus leaves, the most elaborate design used on known American tea table tops. Early records usually list "pillar and claw" or simply "round" tea tables, but a 1767 inventory of George Johnston of Fairfax County reveals another popular term of the period: the "snap table," a description derived from the spring top latch used to secure the tilting top.

Needlework, Norfolk, 1768-69. This needlework picture, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, is the only such southern colonial example that can be traced to a specific school. In March 1766, Elizabeth Gardner advertised that she "had taken a house in Norfolk borough, for the accommodating young Ladies as boarders," where various skills of embroidery and stitching were taught. The piece, made under Gardner's tutelage by 16-year-old Elizabeth Boush, is closely related to mid-18th century English embroideries influenced by engravings in a volume published in Antwerp in 1585. The carefully mixed colors from a variety of shaded cottons, especially in the foreground, reveal an artistic skill most often associated with Virginia work.

Court cupboard, southeastern Virginia, 1660-80. Fashioned of oak and yellow pine with ebonized split spindles and bosses, this court cupboard is one of only two known southern examples. It is the only American cupboard recorded that has an open display shelf over a cabinet; just the reverse is usual. Court cupboards were common in inventories of affluent Virginians and are generally listed with a cupboard cloth. These cupboards may have been considered "sideboards," even in the 17th century. William Fitzhugh of Virginia wrote in 1688 that he thought it "as well politic as reputable" to have a cupboard. At his death he owned 122 objects of silver, far more than the houses of most Chesapeake gentry, which tended to be quite bare.



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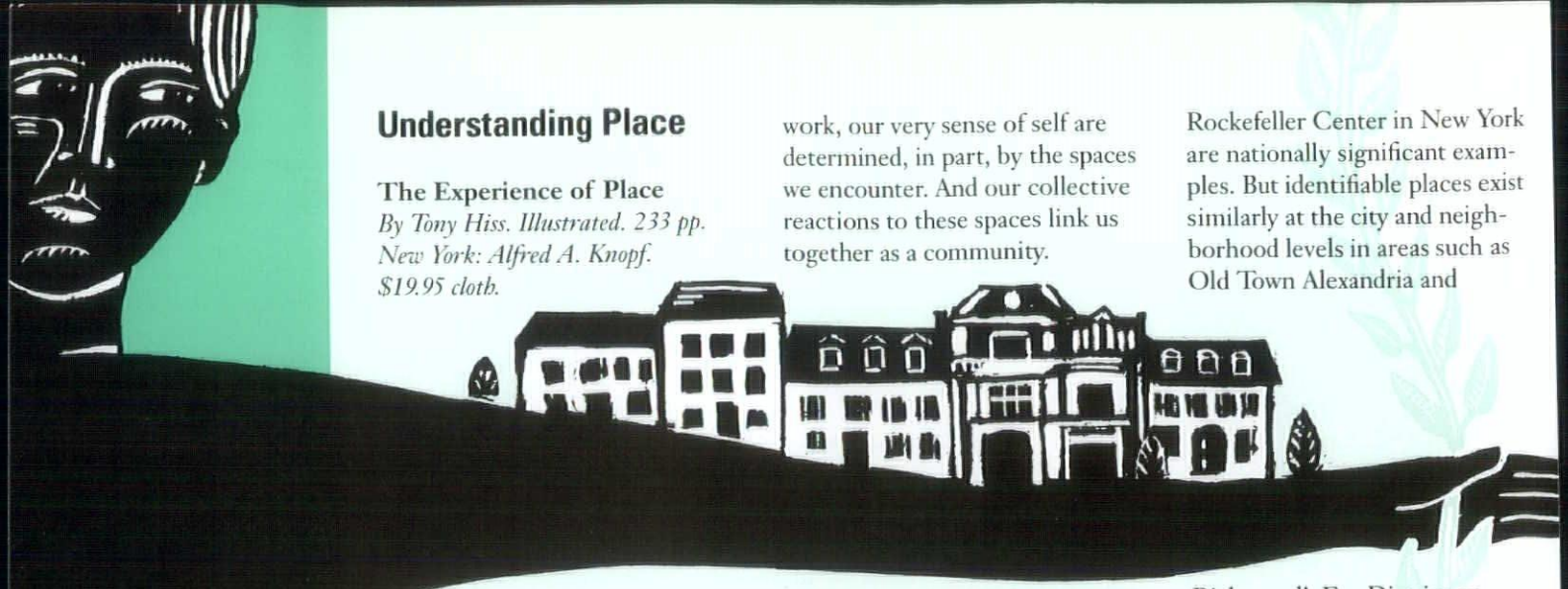
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Understanding Place

The Experience of Place
By Tony Hiss. Illustrated. 233 pp. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. $19.95 cloth.



Robert Meganck

By Morton B. Gulak

In *The Experience of Place*, author Tony Hiss takes a unique approach to exploring his central theme: the recovery of our physical environment. His method is to link an awakening of individual awareness of space to a new ethic for planning and design of the physical world. The implication is that by following Hiss's lead, the shapers of our world can create cities, suburbs and countrysides that are better balanced with human needs.

But how does one go about arousing such an awareness? For Hiss, the watershed experience was to visit Grand Central Station. To his amazement, the thousands of people there rushed to meet trains, exit the station, check schedules, and pause to eat, drink or buy newspapers — all without great confusion. Hiss recounts how easily he entered the stream of people and took notice of the sights, sounds and smells that merged into a single experience. All were part of the moment and all connected to the purpose of the place. His point: we don't need special training to be observant.

Through a variety of reactions to other urban and rural places, Hiss reminds us how strongly places affect us. Our interactions with others, our efficiency at work, our very sense of self are determined, in part, by the spaces we encounter. And our collective reactions to these spaces link us together as a community.

But Hiss contends that our fragile "sense of community" often falls victim to rapid development and a lack of thought by planners and architects, who are eroding the history of experience in places and failing to substitute new environments that are rich in feeling. The impersonal architecture that lines the streets of today's Rosslyn, for example, eliminates the sense of arrival that one felt, even as recently as the late '60s, after crossing the Potomac River from Georgetown. The awareness of topography, the anticipation of views, and the feelings of enclosure that made Rosslyn Circle a memorable place no longer exist.

Unfortunately, that pattern is pervasive. Downtowns, roads that once led gradually from city to country, and even rural areas are falling prey to haphazard blandness. But Hiss urges that we not throw in the towel quite yet. By purposefully taking note of our surroundings, he says, we can better identify and protect important places and provide nourishing experiences in new developments. He suggests that a heightened perception of place should simultaneously take into account colors, sounds, smells, light and the position of other people — the elements of experience that combine to create places of real significance. Where might such a place be? The Mall in Washington, D.C., the Lawn at the University of Virginia, and Rockefeller Center in New York are nationally significant examples. But identifiable places exist similarly at the city and neighborhood levels in areas such as Old Town Alexandria and Richmond's Fan District or Shockoe Slip.

In his wide-ranging exploration of cities and landscapes, Hiss draws on writings related to design methods, sociology, psychology, biology and medicine. He taps the expertise of Kevin Lynch and William Whyte, who were instrumental in directing attention to the ways space affects people. Lynch recognized that people traveled through cities with a mental image of their journey. His research highlighted the significance of certain physical elements in providing a sense of security and establishing memorable experiences. Whyte observed people's movements and activities on city streets, plazas and open spaces to find out why some places were crowded and others were not. He found that seats, steps, shade and food promoted interaction among people and full use of public places.

Hiss also emphasizes the importance of countryside experiences and argues for design and planning at a regional scale. Regional thinking follows the direction of Benton McKaye, planner of the Appalachian Trail. It proposes that a variety of experiences be incorporated within urban, suburban and rural environments — a major shift from the prevailing practice of planning along a continuum from urban to rural. The regional model could produce rural experiences within an urban setting and vice versa.

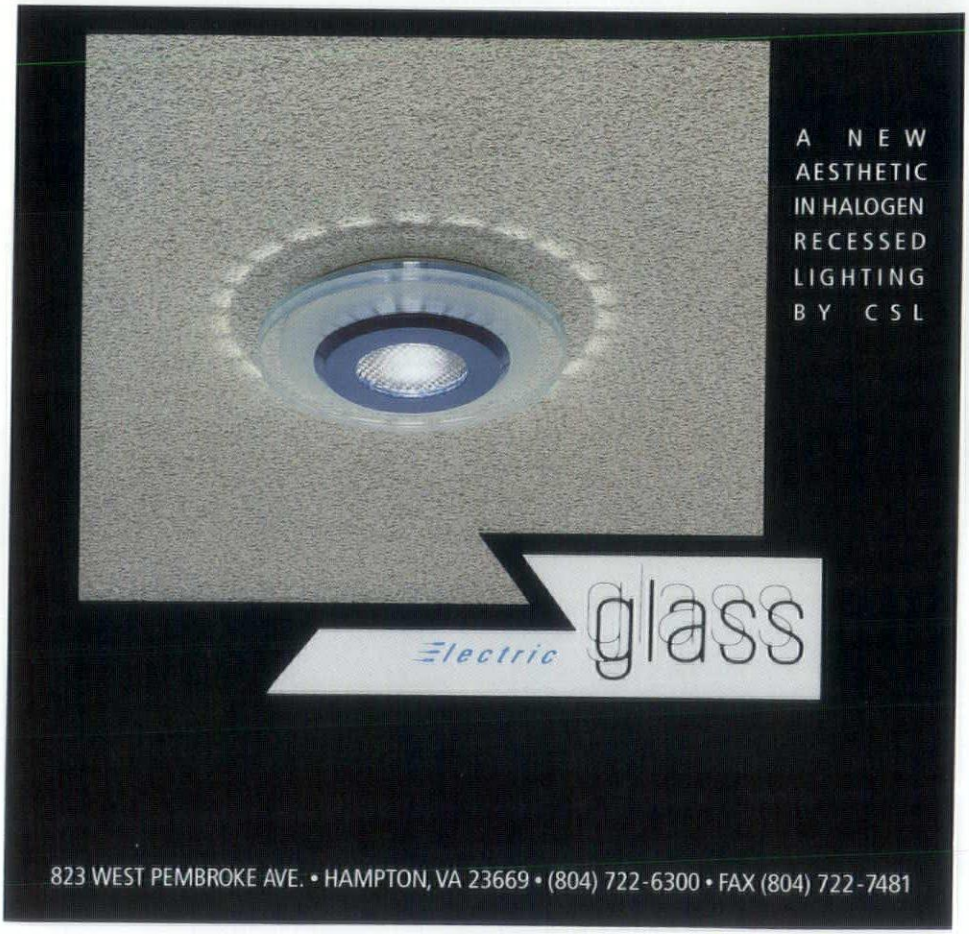
Boston's Urban Wilds Program, for example, is noted for recovering underdeveloped lots and protecting urban woods within the city. In New York City, the Brooklyn/Queens Greenway proposes a 40-mile bicycle and walking path from the Atlantic Ocean to Long Island Sound, a project some have likened to an urban Appalachian Trail.

Hiss, a writer for magazines such as *The New Yorker* and *Rolling Stone*, uses a popular style to make difficult research understandable and accessible. While it's easy to question his belief that we do not have to stop development to achieve a balance of richer experiences in the environment, his model for humane growth is a sensible one. Hiss believes also that it is possible to plan with human experience in mind. He directs citizens to form "experiential watchdog groups" to focus on important places and signal planning commissioners, zoning administrators, design professionals and preservation officials of impending changes for the worse. Embedded in the concept of regional planning, too, is the potential to renew interest in design elements that are common to a specific region. The horizontal growth pattern of southern cities, the condensed and vertical patterns of buildings in the Northeast, the use of indigenous materials and regional colors, textures and building techniques all could foster a sense of place.

The Experience of Place is important reading for developers, planning commissioners, preservationists and public officials who make critical decisions about our cities and countryside. Design professionals, too, can gain a new conceptual approach to design at all levels and begin to implement these ideas in their work. As Hiss optimistically says, the development process can be guided to better our future. Taking this book to heart may be one of the first steps to that end.

Morton B. Gulak is an associate professor in the department of urban studies and planning at Virginia Commonwealth University.





AROUND THE WORLD IN SEARCH OF WOMEN ARCHITECTS

Milka T. Bliznakov

By Robert Gerloff

The early trials of Milka T. Bliznakov, professor of architecture and urban design at Virginia Tech, shaped a woman who is not afraid to speak her mind or adopt unpopular causes.

Bliznakov dates her fearlessness to a promise made to herself in 1959 while defecting from her native Bulgaria. "I know what fear is," she says. "We jumped ship with the clothes on our backs and ran for a day and a night somewhere in the woods. I had no idea where we were going—we were just running. When we stopped somewhere in the woods it was pitch dark and we felt safe. I promised myself that I would never let anybody scare me again, because I realized how much fear I felt, and under how much fear I had lived."

Bliznakov's odyssey from Bulgaria to Blacksburg was a long one. She grew up during World War II as Bulgaria suffered under the Nazis and then the Russians. She was an architecture student at the State Polytechnical University of Sofia during the heyday of Joseph Stalin's Socialist Realism, a style she calls "the first Post-Modernism." After graduating in 1951, she worked as a construction supervisor then a draftsman before earning her architectural registration. But her future in Bulgaria looked bleak. "I traveled to Moscow and could see how things would be in Bulgaria for the next 40 years," she says. "It didn't make sense to stay."

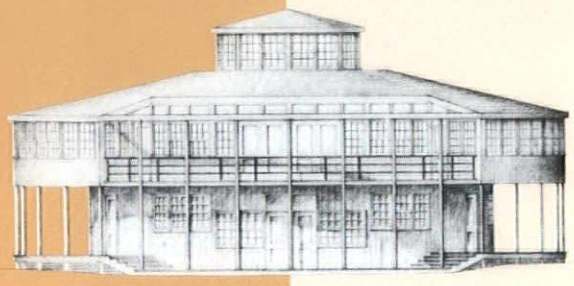
Her escape from Bulgaria took her to France, where she rose once again from draftsman to registered architect before emigrating in 1961 to the United States. "It's marvelous to choose your country rather than being born into one, and the more I know the world the surer I am that I made a marvelous choice," Bliznakov says with an easy laugh. "When people ask if I hate the Communists, I say I don't, because if it wasn't for them I would still be in Bulgaria."

When her plane touched down in New York she spoke five languages, but barely a word of English, which she mastered while again scaling the professional ladder. But as a designer in New York, Bliznakov ran into a communication problem that none of her languages could solve: "I found it very difficult to explain to the client the importance of a well-designed environment. There was always enough money for air-conditioning, but never money for architecture." She left for graduate school at Columbia, fully intending to return to architectural practice. Instead, she found a niche—teaching—that better suited her kind nature.

Bliznakov's latest cause has been the establishment of an International Archive of Women in Architecture. The need for such a collection became apparent when Bliznakov was asked to teach a course on women architects. She agreed, thinking that she would go to the library and put together the necessary material. First she looked up the name of Aino Aalto, wife of Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. There was nothing. So she decided that half of every book about Alvar must be about Aino. Wrong again. Of the several monographs on Alvar, many made no mention of Aino. "I tried the same with Charles Eames, whose wife Ray was a designer and always designed with him," Bliznakov says. "There was nothing on her either. That is what made me realize that there is no information about women architects."

Bliznakov wrote more than 1200 letters to women architects around the world seeking information. Many replied that they had done nothing remarkable. "I have a couple of beautiful letters from elderly women. One got her first job after graduating from architecture school as a secretary in an architectural office. Then she was allowed to do drafting but never got above a senior draftsman. She ended the letter saying that she was very glad she could make a living, meager as it was, from something she really loved. That was her satisfaction from the profession." Bliznakov found this self-effacement, so common among the pioneer generation of women architects, extended to their work. "Women did nonglamorous projects, like low-income housing. Many of them looked at the profession as a service to society, and didn't want their names to be known."

Once the archive was established in the special collections department of Tech's library, Bliznakov concentrated on collecting the papers of pioneer women architects who have retired. Convincing women to donate their papers was more difficult than she anticipated. "Giving their drawings was like giving their sons in marriage," says Bliznakov. Her quest for documents has taken her around the world, and whenever she visits a school of architecture she pores through its files to locate early female graduates. It was through the files at the Eidgenossische Technische Hochschüle, a



House in Amagansett, New York, by Susana Torre

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Zurich university, that she discovered Elizabeth Saxe, a graduate who worked for Aalto in the '30s. Saxe explained that Alvar and Aino worked separately on design competitions, and would then compare results. "Elizabeth said that the Finnish Pavilion [at the 1939 New York World's Fair] was Aino's design. She was there!"

Among the 113 women who have donated their papers to the archive are Susana Torre, an architect and professor at Columbia University; Urmila Eulie Chowdhury, the first women to qualify as an architect in Asia; Liane Zimbler, the first licensed woman architect in Austria; Han Schröder, a Dutch architect who grew up in the famous Rietvelt-Schröder house in Utrecht; and Susana Antonakakis, a founding partner of the Greek firm Atelier 66. Other than small private donations and a grant from the American Institute of Architects for a newsletter, the archive has been established without any special funding.

The importance of the archive goes far beyond its size, for Bliznakov has inspired other institutions to begin collecting the papers of women architects. "There is a psychology in Europe that if Americans want something—and now I'm an American—then it must be valuable," she says in her gravelly accent. But Bliznakov says she doesn't care who collects the material, as long as it's done. "We always go back to history to find new information as we change our perspective in time," she says. "I don't know what purpose the archive will serve or whom. That's for the future to decide."

Bliznakov is returning to Bulgaria this summer as a Fulbright fellow to research avant-garde art and architecture, concentrating on the contributions of women architects. Meanwhile, both the progress of women in architecture and the distance they have to go before achieving equality is apparent to her every day in Cowgill Hall, the architecture building at Virginia Tech. "When I came to Blacksburg, about 6 percent of the students were women. Now in the first year almost 40 percent of the students are female, but I cannot get through to my conservative colleagues and the dean to hire more women in the faculty."

Milka Bliznakov— still—is a woman who is not afraid to speak her mind.

•

Robert Gerloff, a graduate architecture student at Virginia Tech, is a contributing editor to Architecture Minnesota.

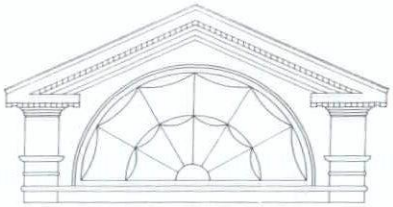


Bliznakov encountered few of the hurdles she found common to the lives of most women architects.

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Rediscovering the Riches of an Historic Mill Town

By Mary Harding Sadler

The story of Danville, Virginia, is told in the broad curve of the Dan River at Wynn's Falls and the rise and fall of Main Street. The exuberance of its architecture, dominated by structures built or remodeled in the late 19th century, speaks volumes about the city's early industrialists. On Danville's historic Main Street, the signs of *laissez faire* prosperity are everywhere: in the lavish ornament of the mansions on Millionaires' Row, in the elaborate brick detailing of the tobacco warehouses and mill buildings, and in the extensive collection of workmen's cottages in the Carpenter Gothic style.

Danville is a southern mill town whose riches await rediscovery. Its historic district "boasts perhaps the most splendid and most concentrated collection of Victorian and early 20th century residential and ecclesiastical architecture in the Commonwealth," according to Calder Loth, senior architectural historian of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

Danville is reached by travel through rolling Piedmont terrain carved into fields of tobacco and soybeans and interrupted by farmhouses and log tobacco barns. At the city's periphery, bypasses lead to Value City and faceless strip shopping centers. To discover Danville's historic identity, pull off the highway and onto North Main Street. There, in a district that existed from 1894-96 as an independent town called Neopolis, is a working class neighborhood whose citizens are surveying their houses in hopes that their architectural character will be preserved intact. (Local legend has it that the name "Neopolis" was bestowed on the town by a Methodist minister preaching a rousing sermon on the "new Greek city.")

In North Danville, otherwise ordinary worker houses feature ornamental fretwork in the porches and gables. Older masonry buildings meet the sky with a flourish of corbeled brick. Cast iron cresting crowns the roofs of the more elaborate residences. And a mixed bag of modern and late 19th century commercial structures lines North Main as it descends to the river and into the guts of industrial Danville.

Less celebrated than the city's residences, but equally remarkable, are its commercial structures — the tobacco warehouses, textile mills and factories that line the riverbanks. The towering sign of Dan River Mills dominates the point where Main Street, once an Indian trail and now Business Route 29, crosses the Dan River.

The elaborate spindles on a porch in Danville (top) are among the details found in what is perhaps the state's most splendid collection of Victorian and early 20th century residential and church architecture.

In earlier times this natural ford provided crossing to nomadic Indians. The area's first white settlers established a trading center here at Wynn's Falls in the 1790s. Danville's location on the river proved convenient for the inspection and shipping of the bright leaf tobacco grown by farmers who had migrated from the depleted farmlands of tidewater Virginia. A canal and lock system, still partially intact, enabled the transport of tobacco and other goods around the falls, down the river and ultimately to Albemarle Sound. In 1856, the Richmond and Danville Railroad opened a transportation network to the city which virtually guaranteed its prosperity well into the 20th century.

The Southern Railroad forms the backbone of Danville's Tobacco Warehouse and Residential Historic District. Mills and warehouses crowd Bridge Street, which parallels the river. Looking at them, it is not hard to envision a bustling warehouse district that an 1885 observer compared to New York or Chicago. Danville was one of the few southern cities to flourish in the years following the Reconstruction. The economic success enjoyed both by townspeople and men who came from nearby counties was due in part to the development of chew and twist tobacco in the 1870s and '80s, and in part to the establishment in 1882 of the Riverside Cotton Mills, which later became Dan River Mills. Mill Number 1 still stands at the corner of Main and Bridge streets.

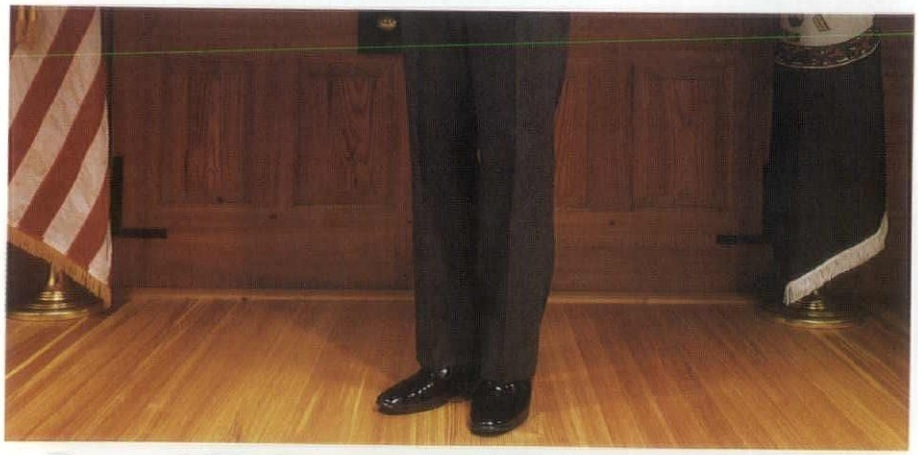
Just outside the tobacco warehouse district, two- to four-story commercial structures edge Main Street. Spurred on by a city-sponsored façade improvement program, these storefronts are being renovated and reoccupied. The Hotel Danville, once host to governors and celebrities passing through the area, has been successfully renovated as apartments for the elderly. Danville's tobacconists and industrialists developed the area just south of downtown. Local builder-architects erected mansions in the high styles of the day, along with an amazing collection of churches whose carefully delineated spires still dominate the skyline. Textbook examples of Italianate, Gothic, Colonial Revival, Eastlake and Queen Anne

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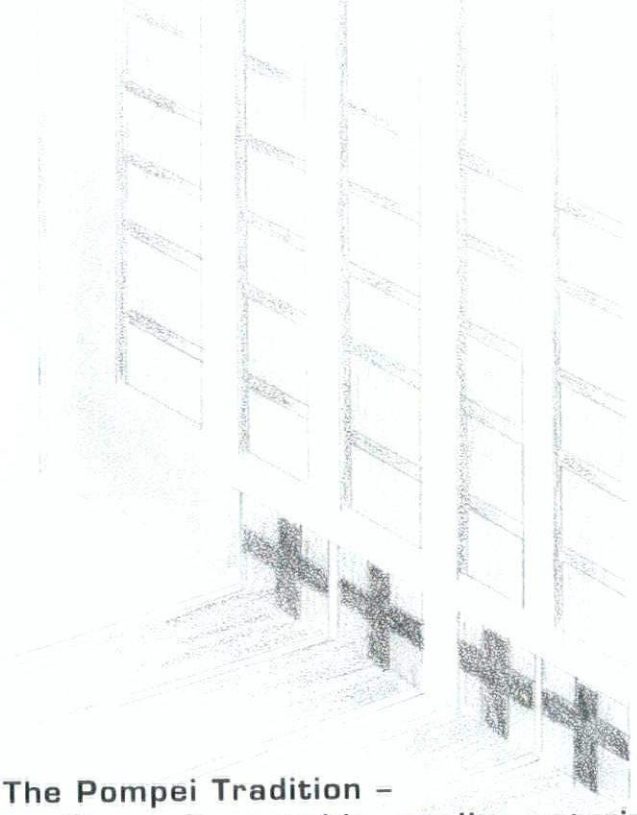
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architecture line Main Street along Millionaires' Row. On the side streets modest dwellings echo these themes in fanciful wooden porches and trim.

The Sutherlin House, built in 1857-58 for a wealthy banker and tobacconist, commands the crest of Main Street. Major William T. Sutherlin, in his time one of Danville's leading citizens, was for a week Jefferson Davis' host when the Confederate President sought asylum from the Union Army at the close of the Civil War. Today the Italian Villa-style mansion houses Danville's Museum of fine Arts. Danvillians are proud to point out that their city was the last capital of the Confederacy and, little more than a decade later, the birthplace of Lady Astor, first woman to sit in the British House of Commons. They should be just as proud that the tangible evidence of this heritage has remained largely intact for so long.

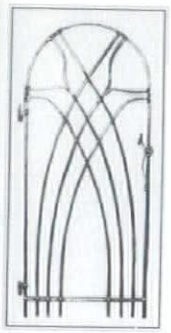
Despite growth due to several annexations of county land, at its core Danville still has the look and feel of a small town. Main Street's skyline is little changed since the turn of the century. Danville's principal bridges, designed in the 1920s by nationally renowned bridge designer Daniel Luten, still carry travelers and business people from the city's north to its south. The Schoolfield hydroelectric plant, originally developed by Dan River Mills and recently purchased by a small power company, is up and running again. The grocery store still delivers and the dry cleaner continues to pick up laundry from the customer's hall closet.

The cost of living in Danville remains far lower than other metropolitan areas in the state, and in 1985 Danville was declared by *Places Rated Almanac* to be one of the country's most livable cities. The traveler who pulls off the bypass to wind his way along Main Street and across the Dan River will find a wealth of well-preserved Victorian houses, as well as the mills and warehouses whose existence has ensured Danville's continued prosperity.

◆

Mary Harding Sadler is an historical architect with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

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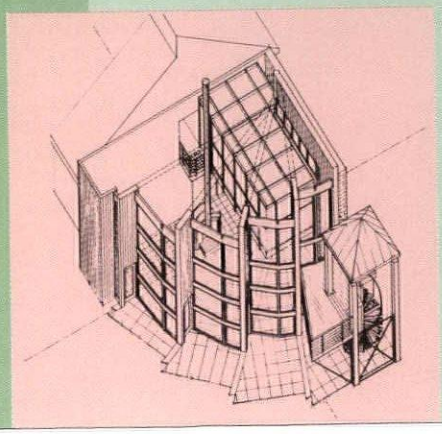
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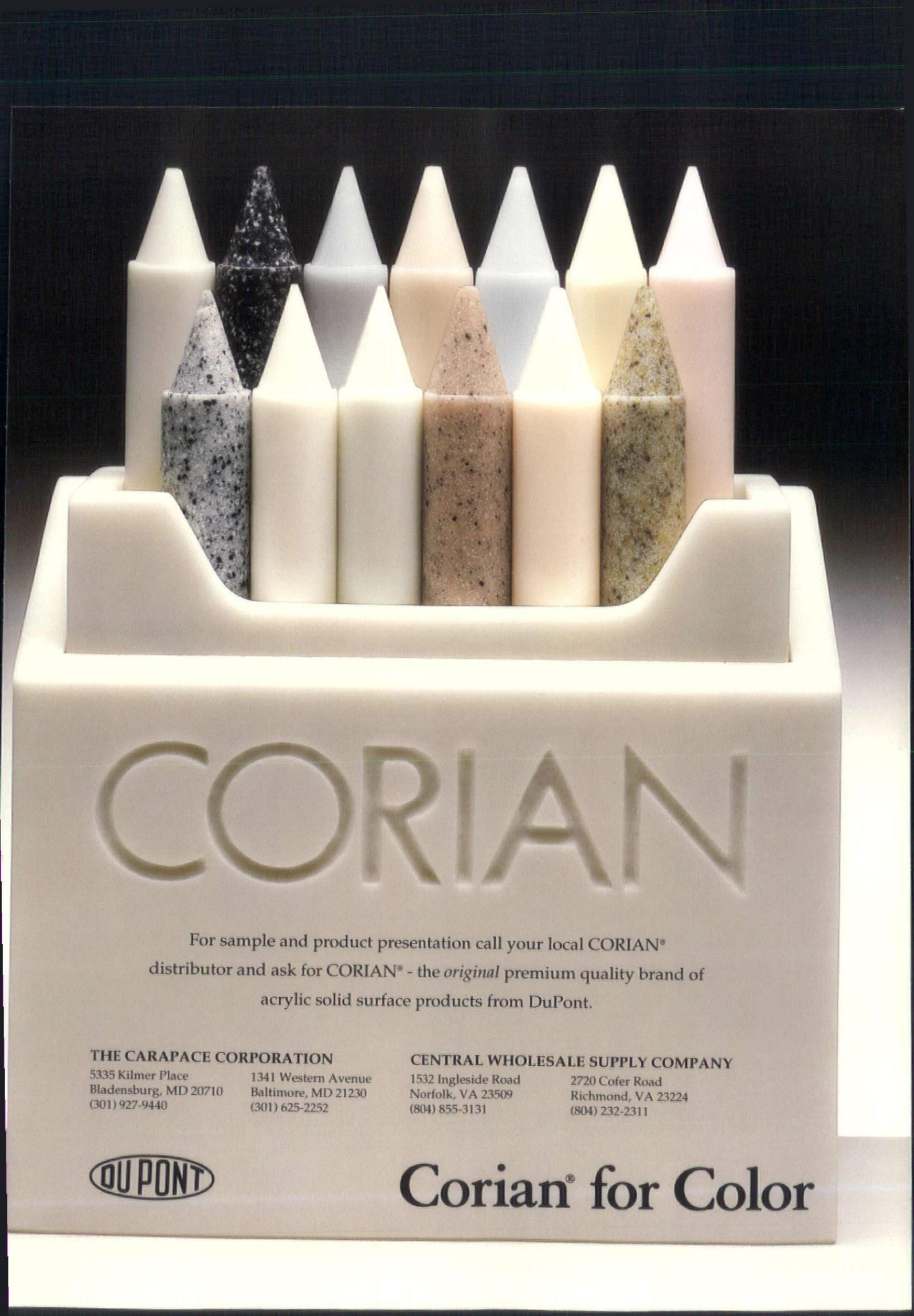
inform

Coming Up

In our next issue, Inform will showcase the work of emerging young architects, explore new visions for college campuses and profile the state board that reviews new building designs and art. In our departments, we will visit the architect who crossed an ocean for clues to restore the Williamsburg courthouse and ruminate on the making of the humble pencil.



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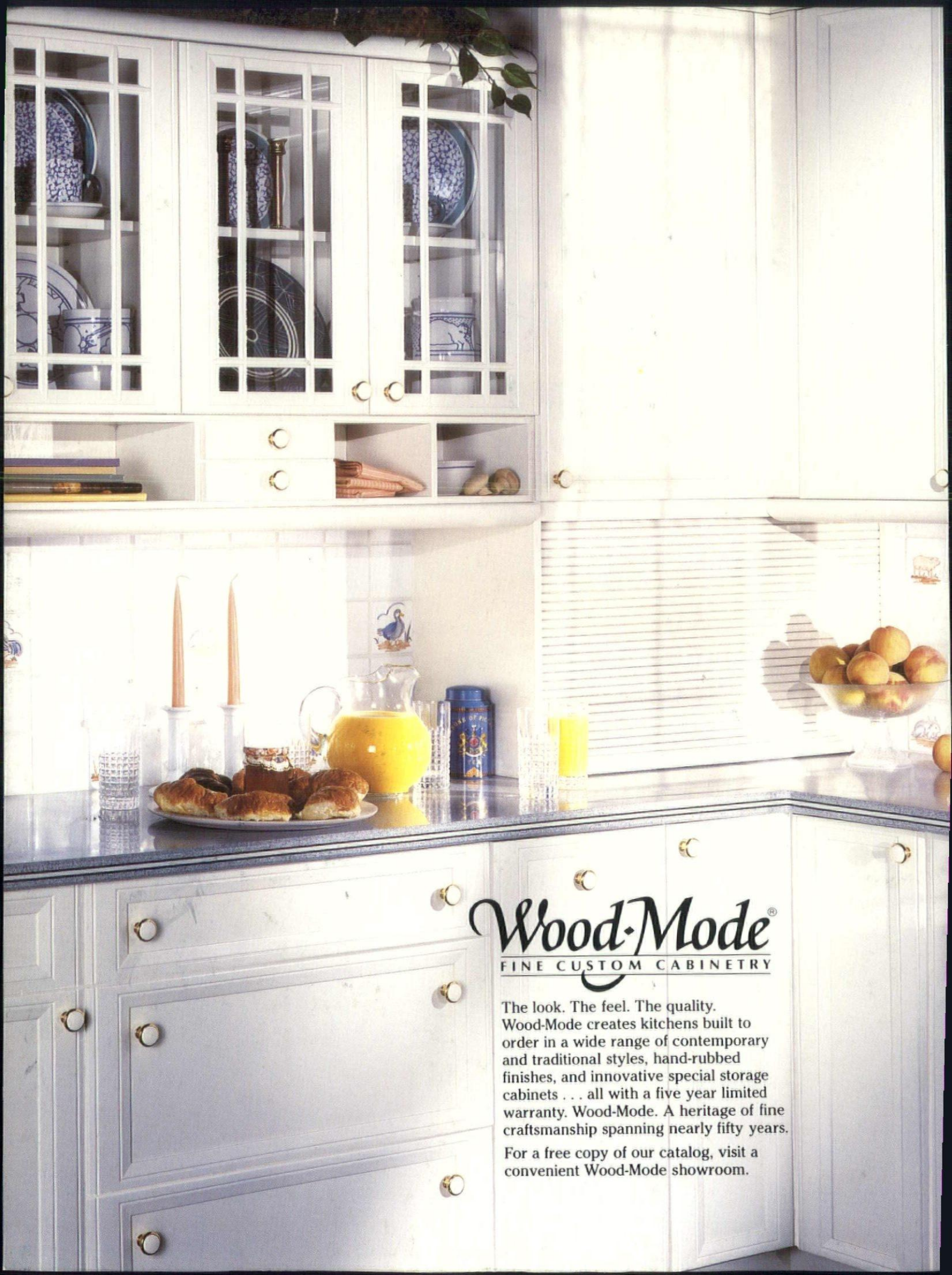
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